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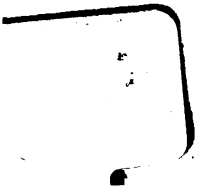
The Mother of Pauline

L. Parry Truscott



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THE MOTHER OF PAULINE

THE MOTHER OF PAULINE

BY

L. PARRY TRUSCOTT

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1904

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340171
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.
1904

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TO

P. H. L.

WHO, BY TREATING AS "WORK" WHAT HAD SERVED AS A PASTIME, SET OPEN A DOOR INTO THE FUTURE WIDE ENOUGH TO LET OUT A DEFINITE AMBITION AND A HOPE (STILL UNATTAINED)

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

NOT BECAUSE THE WRITER THINKS IT WORTHY OF HIS ACCEPTANCE, OR BELIEVES THAT IT FULFILS MORE THAN A SMALL PART OF HIS CHEERING PROPHECY, BUT SIMPLY BECAUSE WHEN GRATITUDE IS WARM IT IS HARD TO KEEP IN HIDING

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"For Thesis, Innocence He takes
Thence (most profound of mysteries)
Sin His Antithesis He makes,
And of these Virtue—Synthesis."

P. H. SULHAM.

BOOK I

THE PARTING

"Ah, life, what is it but a flower?
Why must true lovers sigh?
Be kind, have pity; my own, my pretty."

A. E. HOUSMAN.

"Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met and never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

BURNS.

BOOK I

I

BEHIND them—glitteringly white in the sunshine, impudent, gay, self-sufficient, and yet lightly touched with the mysterious, the undefinable—rose the Grand Stand at Epsom. With it they seemed to share the open downs, the summer sunshine, the clean, fresh air, the solitude. Their backs were turned by choice, as the back of the Stand is turned by force, at least of circumstance, to the fitful movements of the red-coated golfers, to the occasional bursts of life which break out round the little station; they faced, as the white empty stand faces, the descent of soft grass, the stretch of fields, the greenery of tree-tops with Headley Church nestling closely among them in the distance.

Everard Lomas, stretched at full length, turned himself about, resting his elbows on the grass, and his thin, long face between his thin, long hands, and gazed up at the strange white erection, so gay, so self-sufficient in spite of desertion and solitude.

"It isn't as if it had never seen life!" he said.

"We were talking about Aunt Robina-Anne's cruet a moment ago," Pauline complained.

"Were we? When we're married we'll bring it here

and hide it. We'll mount to the top of the Stand, and stow it under a seat, and I promise you we shan't be worried any more with Aunt What's'er-name's cruet."

"And then what shall we say when Aunt Robina-Anne invites herself to dinner, and misses it from the center of the table? Who ever does have a great ugly thing like that in the middle of the table now, I should like to know? Bottles big enough to hold pints, and brassy-looking silver enough to barb-wire a field. No one, least of all the giver, could help missing it, and what should we say?"

"You could say you'd not had time to clean it, and that you could not possibly trust such a treasure to a servant. It's a good thing one of us is blessed with a fertile imagination, for that's where you lack—if you lack anything. But you'll always find me resourceful; I shall always be able to invent a way out of these little difficulties for you. Do you know how to clean plate, Pauline?"

"Yes, of course," said Pauline.

Everard shifted his position sufficiently to allow of his taking one of the girl's hands in his and lifting it to his face. He rested his lips against it, rather than kissed it, for a long minute, then he let it fall back into her lap, and seemed to resume his scrutiny of the Grand Stand.

Yet his speech held no reference to it. "How wonderful it seems," he said, "that those dear hands should be so ready to work for me! But the slavey shall clean the plate—I won't have you doing anything you need not do."

"Oh, Everard!" Pauline exclaimed. "If you knew how delightful it seems even to think of doing anything for you!"

"Darling! I don't deserve that you should feel like that, and even less that you should tell me."

Pauline gave him a steady look, her eyes narrowing.

"That's where you are so funny," she said. "The feeling is everything and the telling nothing, and yet you value the words most."

"The outward symbol more than the spiritual grace?"

"Yes, I believe you do really, but how can you?"

"I don't really; not in my heart of hearts. The feeling sprang straight from your heart and buried itself in mine; but the words—the words were so cozy! They compelled an immediate equivalent—in words."

"Everard! How you do wriggle! Have you a heart of hearts full of priceless things you treasure?"

"Yes," he smiled, "but they are mostly priced. I mean they are things I have paid for in some way or another."

"My love being paid for by your love, for example?"

"Well, yes—I suppose so. I know I have a bargain. I know I am getting yours at a tremendous reduction, at less than half its value——"

"Don't, Everard—don't! When you cheapen yourself I can't bear it"—her voice trembled with intensity. Everard Lomas sat up suddenly that he might put his arms round the girl and turn her toward him.

"My serious darling! I was in fun—you must know it." Then, as she did not look up, he raised her face

that he might compel her eyes to meet his. "I should be unworthy of your mere regard if I thought myself wholly worthy of your love, or any man of any woman's," he declared. "But the best I have to give is yours in desire and intention and fulfilment, please God."

"I know, and how I bless you for it!" said Pauline. "Only sometimes you seem to take things so lightly, you bewilder me. Even our love holds so much responsibility to me"—she broke off, shaking her head and looking straight at him with eyes that were smiling through a soft mistiness. "I know I'm dull—I told you so, and you pretended not to believe it. And I have an exaggerated idea of the importance of so many things which seem trifles to other people. Oh, I know it's true, Everard! And you'll find me worrying to live with——"

"Nonsense," he said. "Sweetheart, that's treason."

"It isn't, it's horribly true. I worry till I grow to hate myself. I can't help it."

"You're good enough for me. You won't worry me," he declared stoutly.

She drew herself out of his embrace, while still keeping her eyes on his face. She seemed to be struck with some new point from which to center her regard of him. She spoke very slowly, little pauses as of uncontrollable emphasis between her words.

"I hope I shall never want to worry you, and find it impossible," she said, but almost as she spoke, and before he could answer, her face changed, and she was in the circle of his arms again, her soft cheek close to his.

"But I love you," she whispered, "more than I shall ever be able to show you; I love you."

Presently she sat up, pushing Everard away. Once more he turned himself about, applying himself to his scrutiny of the Grand Stand, and once again took up his interrupted train of thought concerning it.

"I don't half understand how anything can become as still as that—anything that has felt the throb of life as that old Stand has felt it."

"Isn't it just because it has felt the throb of life so near it that it can be so still?—can seem such an embodiment of stillness? Mustn't one be capable of being greatly stirred before one could ever become very quiet?"

Everard gave a little teasing laugh.

"Now you are taking me as far out of my depths——"

"As what?"

"As before, only in another direction."

"I'm sure it must be like that," she persisted. "Look how quiet very old people grow, and how still. And the more people know, the less they find to talk about, the more restful they are; and the more deeply they have suffered, the less moaning they make. Their natures are absorbed, as it were, by knowledge or feeling, and there is nothing left to babble and chat over. Don't you think it must be like that, Everard?"

Although Pauline always started hotly certain of her theories, she generally ended in a diffident appeal to Everard for confirmation of her opinion.

But Everard Lomas had a way of failing her.

He sprang to his feet now, and held out his hands to help her up.

"I daresay you're right, darling," he said lightly, "you generally are. But if I had seen all the hum this grinning old place has seen, even though I was made of wood —newly painted wood—I think I should have something to say about it. But we ought to be pushing on. Come along."

He put his arm about the girl, and drew her with him down the slope. There was no one in sight; they seemed to have the place, the long, late summer afternoon to themselves. He did not look back, but Pauline did several times, and each time her brow was puckered over her brown eyes; each time she might have stumbled and fallen but for Everard's guiding arm.

Yet as they wandered further on, with Everard so close to her, his voice, tuned to pretty compliments and thrilling with boyish love-making, ringing in her ear, she forgot that on the top of the downs they had started a subject only to leave it unsifted; forgot that Everard had asked a question, and been too impatient to seek for the answer.

Left to herself Pauline would have gone on eagerly trying to drag the half-hidden thing into fuller light. People constantly perplexed her by the way they caught up fugitive ideas, sharpened their wit on them for a moment or two, and carelessly cast them away again: sometimes she seemed to live so surrounded by the *débris* from other minds that she had no room to move in herself. Life was full of surprises to Pauline, but almost the strangest thing that had so far presented itself to her intelligence was the mental untidiness of those she came in contact with; often she felt herself

worn with her futile endeavors to pick up and arrange the mind-lumber crowding out her own little thoughts. Sometimes she grew breathless and afraid. Would she ever succeed in clearing enough space about herself to think in?

And of all offenders in this respect the man she loved best was perhaps the greatest. But then no one else could wipe out for her the sense of defeat and unrest with soft words and kisses as he could. While he held her hand in his long, thin fingers he could charm her mood to follow his in any direction he pleased. When he set his lips to hers he could blot out the world. Only one surprise was left among the many that at other times beset her—that she should have been counted worthy of such joy.

II

THEY wandered on quite slowly. There was a green glade to pass through, and it tempted them to further lingering before they left it for the narrow, dusty road. When they reached Headley it was fully tea-time.

They had their tea in the postmistress's upstairs parlor; Pauline chose it in preference to the inn opposite. Everard called it their breaking in to Darby and Joanism, and drank to their future happy meals in the tea Pauline poured out to him. They laughed like merry children at each other's jokes, they emptied the plates of bread and butter and biscuits and home-made jam with childish appetite and enjoyment. Sometimes their hands met on the coarse tablecloth—they were both so young, and there was no one to see. Pauline had her hat off. When he had finished, Everard jumped up and kissed her soft, curly hair.

"That is my thanks," he said, "for a good tea."

They moved about the little room, filled to overflowing with things recognizable as birthday, Christmas and wedding presents—the collected fareings of several generations. They carefully touched the strange ornaments in painted glass and china, examined the family photographs, peered at the silver trophies locked up in the bookcase, the brightly bound prize-books.

"Delightfully stuffy all of it," Everard said. "But we ought to be going, Pauline. And as we can't steal the silver, and shouldn't care for it if we could, I don't think we'll take anything."

So Pauline obediently pinned on her shady hat. But Everard rested his face on her warm, sweet hair again first, and kissed a little curl on her forehead.

"What a lucky girl to have the prettiest hair in the world!" he said, and kissed the fugitive dimple his words set in her cheek.

"What a lucky boy to be so easily pleased!"

"But I am not easily pleased," he declared. "I am mightily particular—you'll soon find that out."

And then they descended the breakneck stairs in quest of the postmistress and her reckoning. Pauline never had any money in her pocket, and the way in which Everard joked about the small amount he was called upon to pay was quite wonderful and very pleasant to her. Her father was not really badly off in the matter of income, but poorly equipped in economy. Without making the slightest show for it or seeming to benefit anyone, least of all himself, he personally spent the lion's share of what he earned, and allowed his family to scramble for, and do the best they could with what remained.

Pauline was not good at scrambling; while no one picked up much, she could be relied on to pick up the least. The pale-blue cotton dress she was wearing—because Everard liked her best in blue—she had washed and ironed herself in readiness for to-day's outing, and a good deal of its paleness was due to the number of

times it had been submitted to the cleansing process. She had made it herself, too; at the time with some pride in the small amount of material that had entered into its composition. But it proved a pride doomed to be short-lived. She had skimped her dress to eke out the price of a hat, but the hat had been unfortunate—not worth the sacrifice. Everard had failed to give it his approval in words, and in a fit of distaste to it she had allowed a shower to wreck its cheap fineness.

The hat she had on now belonged to Gertrude. All the Ayres girls showed themselves generous in lending what clothes they possessed to each other; especially Gertrude, the eldest, when she happened to be in what her sisters called her "mothering mood." Everard had been pleased to admire this hat, but Pauline had not thoroughly enjoyed this admiration. She let slip what she considered the right moment to admit the secret of its ownership, being unwilling to open his eyes, as she believed it must, to their limited means. She spent an uncomfortable, conscience-tossed ten minutes, and then, into the middle of something particularly interesting to himself that he was telling her, she blurted out a hasty confession that it was not her hat she was wearing but her sister's.

"Jolly sensible of old Ger to let you wear it. You look a great deal prettier in it than she could," Everard had carelessly answered. He was plainly unaware of Pauline's disturbed state of mind, and failing to attach any importance to the matter itself or her view of it, he passed directly back to his interrupted topic with some show of impatience. Sometimes he half feared that

Pauline had a taste for the trivial, a defect he felt it his duty to sternly repress in her.

Without his knowing it, and in spite of the fact that he had only just passed his final examination for the medical profession, and that the practice he was to share with his father, and ultimately to succeed to, was quite a moderately flourishing affair, Everard Lomas was considered by her family a decided "catch" for Pauline. Since her engagement to him she had received repeated injunctions to consider herself very favored—not wholly unmingled with outspoken sisterly surprise at Everard's choice.

"He must meet lots of girls—a doctor's son would," they impressed on her. "And don't think an engagement is the same thing as a marriage—just be careful. Slips happen. Think a little what you're saying—if you can. Don't give us all away, because there's no need." Out of this spirit of carefulness sprang some of Gertrude's readiness to lend her best hat. As she admitted Gertrude's ownership, Pauline could plainly hear the "Little silly!" with which her sister would scornfully have greeted the characteristic confession.

Added to her own desire to please her young lover, her sisters' many warnings rendered Pauline painfully sensitive to her family's shortcomings, and caused her to exaggerate unduly the small differences in their manner of living and that to which Everard was accustomed. She had actually been for long half-frightened of his finding out that the Ayres' household dinner took place in the middle of the day, while he, from habit, associated the meal with the evening. And she had

been surprised that he passed the difference over, when it came to light, as quite unimportant.

She did not yet realize that only matters that touched him personally greatly affected Everard. When Pauline was his wife she would dine when he dined, at the proper time for that exercise; only small tradespeople and the working classes nowadays upset their digestions by clinging to an earlier hour, and they did not count: even Pauline's joining them in this particular at present did not make them count. If she had only known she might have spared herself all her anxiety about what Everard would think of this and that connected with her life until her life passed into his.

It simplifies things a great deal to look at them only as they affect oneself. It gives a remarkably clear if remarkably limited outlook. Had Pauline been able to halve this propensity with him when she took his name, life would surely have been easier for both of them.

III

EVEN on the return walk they still lingered—it was so sweet to be together; the way they went, the evening hours, seemed so entirely given up to them—to them alone. They had so much to tell, so much to hear.

"I don't think I knew half how I loved you until now," said Pauline. All her pride and pleasure in the wonderful discovery was in her voice. "You are so dear, so dear," she whispered.

"And you are all mine? All my own?" Everard questioned, filled with a man's unquenchable thirst for possession.

"You know!"

"But say it. I love to hear you say it."

"You know I'm yours; all yours," said Pauline, with a woman's gladness in surrender.

Her sweet face, flushed and radiant one moment, shy and infinitely alluring the next, was turned to him; her eyes shone full of mystery; the warm touch of her hand in his sent the blood coursing through his veins in a delicious fervor. They were walking in the green glade again; under the trees the shadows were deepening, the air about them was still and very warm. Nature herself seemed pausing, snatching a brief rest in her unceasing

round; yet waiting, watching, alert to see what two more of her children would do brought face to face with her and with themselves.

Would they prove true to the tradition that sets a definite prize on the things that are visionary, or true to her who has taken the preservation of a race into her jealous keeping?

Nature seemed pausing; but her rest is only relative at most. She had flung herself into the way of these two without warning, and suddenly the way was alive with temptations—subtle, bewildering, bewitching. The commonest fall at the end, and all about it a glory of sweetness, of warmth, of illusion—the illusion called love!

At the mercy of a mood, caught, trapped, thrilling, Everard stopped and held out his arms. "Pauline! Pauline!" he said, his voice hoarse and shaken.

"What is it?" she whispered back, and for answer he had only kisses to give her, yet what other answer did she need?

"You are mine—as it is you're mine—only," and still they clung tighter and tighter to each other, children trembling at the touch of Mother Nature, the powerful, the pitiless; clinging feverishly to each other when they should have set the width of the glade between them. Aye, and more than that, much more than that, indeed.

Can not one fancy Nature as she hurried on, secure in her triumph, sending her soft mocking laugh back to them through the tree-tops? After all, how easy are her victories! How often does she succeed for once she fails! Before nightfall she had a world to rearrange,

but in her leisure moments she is no idler—idling was never to her taste. And some there are who profess to worship Nature as a god. A god! The images of wood and stone the heathen bow to are as god-like, surely?

So before they reached the Grand Stand the dusk had fallen. In the dim uncertain half-light it no longer showed brave and gay, but shadowy and sinister, well-nigh shapeless, evil-favored. They had mounted the slope in silence—neither had words in which to express the troubled depths of their young throbbing hearts. A new page of life had been turned for them, a page with one act only set in indelible letters across its whiteness. How were they to fill it up? How? They could not tell; the glare of that staring, almost empty page dazzled and confused them. The suddenness with which the past of an hour ago appeared to have separated itself from the present or the future distracted them. They had meant to make no difference, but a difference had sprung up already, and would not be denied. In the silence, each in the fashion they were born to, they were accepting it as best they might.

And now Everard could feel Pauline trembling. She was always impressionable, influenced by light and shade to an extraordinary degree, moved by every wind, by a word, by the unvoiced thoughts of those near her, and to-night every nerve in her was alive, vibrating.

"Look," she said, "the ghosts are thick about the Stand now, Everard."

"Nonsense, darling. What nursery rubbish!"

"The ghosts of sins," she whispered breathlessly. "So much worse than the ghosts of people. Hurry—

they are waiting for us! They—they are claiming us, Everard!"

"Child, do be sensible: the place looks simply romantic—and rather attractive. You mustn't be so foolish, darling. We'll hurry, of course, but——"

To keep up with her he was obliged to do that. As they went he had put a protecting arm round her.

"Your dress is quite damp," he broke off to say, feeling down her thin cotton sleeve. "It must be getting late, and damp is a far worse enemy than ghostly sins. We ought to have been at the station before this, but the time has slipped away so. Jove! if we've lost the train! These trains hardly run after sunset. Wait a moment, sweetheart, and let me light a match."

"In a minute or two," she pleaded. "We're hurrying, so in a minute or two will do as well, won't it? I know it's haunted—I can feel it—haunted with sins——"

But Everard stopped short. "What utter nonsense!" he exclaimed. "And I must know the time."

Pauline went on a few steps alone, and then paused irresolutely, stayed by the sound of Everard coughing. All the year round he kept a little spasmodic cough which seemed to increase the moment questions of cold or damp were discussed, however casually; a fact which caused it to be very generally disregarded except by Pauline. When he had finished coughing he called to her.

"We've lost the train—long ago."

"But there'll be another?"

"Not from here. We must walk to Epsom Town

and see what can be done. We shall be pretty late home."

"I—oh! whatever will they say to me? And I'm tired now." She spoke fretfully, tears in her voice.

But Everard was coughing again and did not seem to hear her. She came quickly to his side, her querulousness subdued; her former fears lost in a fresh one; her newly discovered fatigue forgotten as soon as found.

"Dearest, you'll catch cold; whatever shall we do? Your cough will be worse; you'll be ill." She pulled at his sleeve to hurry him on. "Let's be quick. I've taken no care of you, and you're not strong like I am. I never catch cold, but you will; I'm afraid you have already."

"No, no," Everard said; "at least I hope not. I always have this cough"—he punctuated his speech with it—"but it's nothing to fidget about; nothing at all."

He was no longer scornful, however, of her readiness to take alarm. These were fears he could appreciate, and he found them quite natural. He shivered a little. "It *is* damp," he murmured. Pauline's sympathy was very comforting, very endearing, entirely his own. And sympathy always set him shivering, it was quite as fatal in that respect as damp air. By the time they reached Epsom Town anxiety for her lover had wiped out, for the time at least, every other consideration for Pauline.

"When I have you always to myself I must take better care of you than this," she sighed. "I must mend my careless ways."

"You've less than three weeks to do it in," he smiled.

"How soon it seems! How soon!"

"You are mine now," he reminded her jealously, "as much mine as if the bells had rung for us."

Pauline's voice had softened gradually to its accustomed level of gentle sweetness, but as she answered him now it rang with the alarm, the moving distress, that as they passed the Grand Stand had found vent only in a fanciful, a childish nervousness, while pointing to depths of feeling beyond her powers of expression.

"The bells—oh! the bells are followed by a blessing, and we want that, Everard! You want it, don't you? Say you do."

"I do, of course," he reassured her. "But to-night I only feel my need of you."

Her solicitude for his health, her alternating tenderness and fears, her extreme feminality—forming at once her weakness and her strength—had all served to draw her closer to him than ever before. He tried to press her hand, but she snatched it away in a sudden passionate gust of repulsion.

"No," she said, "no, Everard, I—you mustn't touch me!" And then, almost before the words were out she had caught his hand in hers, in the tightest clasp of her warm fingers.

"Dear, I had forgotten, and you feel so ill! What a horrible creature I am to forget—and I am always forgetting. I know you are feeling ill—I know it."

Once more her immediate concern for Everard shut out the intangible terror that already hovered over her, the terror that alone was destined to remain with her of a holiday begun with how much gladness, with how light a heart?

THE PARTING

The troublesome journey was overshadowed. Pauline's face was distressed—she was overwrought to the verge of hysteria. Everard flushed painfully, coughed frequently. He insisted on seeing her all the way to Balham, right to her door, although it meant his catching with difficulty, and at some risk, the last train back to New Town, where he lived. He would not listen when she begged him not to do it; when she tried her hardest to persuade him to spare himself the extra journey.

"As if I couldn't manage!" she said. "You're just like Ger and father, making me out so helpless. Why, I shouldn't mind at all—indeed, I would much rather."

"As if I should allow my wife out alone at this hour!" he said, forcing a faint smile.

The name hotly colored her cheeks, awoke in her a dozen conflicting, suffocating emotions, but she brushed them hastily, and with some bravery, aside.

"Nothing would happen to me," she declared. "And it's nearly three weeks before your responsibilities will fasten on you."

"I have hugged my chains already," he told her, "and I wouldn't let them go if I could."

He proved himself beyond persuasion, but apparently he did not try to check his now frequent attacks of coughing. When he made sacrifice over small matters he always chose for them a wide prominence.

"Darling, take care of yourself for my sake, and don't be ill—oh, don't be ill," were Pauline's parting words to him at the gate.

They died away, a small pitiful wail lost in the clatter

of his retreating footsteps along the pavement, but in his mind he carried them with him—to find them evil-omened.

While Everard hurried away from her Pauline waited at the gate as though the very echo of his footsteps was more than she could afford to lose. Everard had wanted to knock at the door before leaving her, but in this she had overruled him. She had promised not to be long, to go in almost directly, and Everard, if he meant to catch that last train, had no time to waste in argument, and was forced to leave her there.

And although she quite intended to keep her promise to Everard, as a matter of fact she lingered far longer than would have pleased him. For once he had left her side, once his presence and influence were withdrawn, the apprehensions that had been shadowing her fastened on Pauline; the phantom terrors became in a measure real, so that she could not ward them off, could not escape them any longer.

Now she knew—and it was herself she feared—herself and Everard. A new self, a new Everard, bound to each other, more than ever bound to each other, and yet at war with each other too.

What was behind them? In the darkness she held out her arms in a wild, voiceless appeal to the old child-self, the old boyish lover, to come back, to come back and save her. It was too hard . . . why had they deserted her? . . . she had never meant to let them go!

What was before them—this new self of whom she was without experience, this new Everard of to-day?

The victim of an acutely vivid imagination, she called up in a flash a hundred things before them, and trembled at them all. It was too hard . . . why had fate so used her? . . . She had never meant to give up the guardianship of her life to casual fate!

When, quite suddenly, she turned to the door and knocked at it, she was shaking all over. She almost stumbled across the threshold in her haste.

"Ger, dear," she said to the girl who opened the door to her, "I'm so glad you're up"; and added excitedly, "I'm so glad to be home, Ger!"

IV

MEANWHILE Everard, carrying Pauline's parting words with him, was hurrying to the train. There had been a break, almost a sob, in her voice, and catching something of her emotion he became quite uncomfortable, not on her account but on his own. He made his way back to the station as quickly as he could, and after all had ten minutes to spare; he spent the time shivering in the waiting-room. When he let himself into his father's house at New Town he was feeling too ill to eat the supper left for him on the dining-room table. He had a disturbed, restless night, and by the next day was looking white and wretched enough to attract the attention of a medical man, a friend of old Dr. Lomas, who was staying in the house.

Humphrey Martin was the possessor of just that combination of cleverness and eccentricity by which, judiciously balancing the one against the other, some men manage to achieve so much. It was characteristic of him that he made nothing, conversationally, of his unusual brain power, but a great deal of his unusually gay waistcoats. He was, however, a man who seemed incapable of shirking a duty in whatever obscurity of guise it might present itself to him. He had, indeed, as keen

a mania for unearthing far-away calls to occupy his mind as for discovering strange garments to clothe his body. But the task for which he had volunteered now was one he would willingly have shifted to other shoulders had it been possible, and he spoke with an effort his old friend detected immediately.

"That boy of yours doesn't look up to the mark, Lomas," he said. "Been working too hard. Looks as if he wanted overhauling and sending abroad, not marriage and a sleepy practice. Don't want to upset you, Lomas, probably unnecessarily too, but you know——"

"Yes, I know," said the father. "I see his poor mother in him every time I look at him, and I haven't forgotten the cause of her death."

"Well, let me have a talk with him. I've an idea that might work in. We might put off this wedding a little while, and send him to sea—it would give him a chance of filling out a bit, anyhow. What's the girl like?"

"A dear little girl, but her people—a little difficult, I am afraid."

"Well, they'll have to listen to reason if it's necessary, and I've no wish to break into 'Love's young dream' unless it is. Give me half an hour with him and I'll find out. He looks ill, and I don't like that cough and those lantern jaws—in him."

"He's all I have, Martin," the old doctor said simply.

"Yes, that's it. That's why I'm bent on filling him out and fattening him up, and making him generally more presentable for you. A little care, that's about all that's wanted."

But after his interview with Everard, he sat on for some minutes, his legs stretched straight in front of him, his hands in his trousers' pockets, and his prominent eyes staring into vacancy after a fashion of his when he was worried.

He did not care at all about Everard; he was a man of rather violent and startling prejudices, and for no reason in particular he objected strongly to the son of a father for whom he had early in life formed an ardent, a romantic attachment. Old Dr. Lomas had once been able to render Martin a service, at a time when he was little more than a lad struggling to find himself a place in the world with an overweight of intellect and an almost imperceptible income, and he had chosen to magnify that willingly tendered service into a lifelong obligation; to make it the root of an affection unchanging, intense.

And now he was faced with the uncongenial office of telling his old friend what he knew must go very hardly with him.

"Hang the boy!" said Martin to himself, with obvious unfairness.

Dr. Lomas had married late in life, and his wife had developed rapid consumption shortly after, leaving him alone with Everard as a mere infant. Out of a well-nigh broken heart he had bravely built himself a shrine for the child of his soon-spent happiness. The boy, as he said, was all he had—all he wanted.

He had tried from the first to fit himself to supply a mother's as well as a father's place, so that his motherless son might feel as little as possible the blank in his

young life. He had, at any rate, succeeded in fostering in his own heart an all-embracing tenderness any woman might have envied. It was a habit of his often to speak of his son as "poor Adelaide's boy," and his sternest reproof had been, "I am thankful we are not obliged to tell your dear mother this." For twenty-three years he had kept her memory fresh in the house she had inhabited for little more than one, but about it he had hung everything that was sweet and fair: the immortelles of regret were not absent, but they had grown fragrant with time and tending. He told himself every night upon his knees that he held Everard only in trust, but when he had given his account of his stewardship for the day he always humbly thanked his Creator for the gift of his dear son—the child and hope of his old age.

And this was the son that Humphrey Martin had been hectoring and sounding and "speaking his mind to" after his brusque habit. This was the son over whom he was glowering and meditating and muttering now.

He got up at last, shaking himself roughly like a dog out of a pond.

"I believe old Lomas has infected me with his cussed nervousness," he muttered. "The fellow's unsound, that's all, but it's enough and to spare. The fellow's an ass, an ass with brains, a deliberate ass, a conceited, shallow-hearted young prig. Wish to goodness that made an ounce of difference!"

He lounged out of the surgery toward the dining-room, where old Dr. Lomas awaited him. Outside the

door he paused a moment. He took his hands out of his pockets and squared his wide shoulders. He seemed to grow taller.

"What have I done to deserve this?" he asked. Then he let himself quietly in.

V

GERTRUDE AYRES, more familiarly known as Ger, sat with her elbows on the table and her forehead puckered into a frown, while now and then she bit the stump of a lead pencil with revengeful white teeth. She seemed absorbed in a difficult—an insurmountably difficult calculation.

Gertrude was the eldest of the family of five girls, and she was very like Pauline, who came next to her in age; very like, but with just the something that made Pauline so exceedingly pretty left out. All the Ayres girls were striking looking, and so alike that if you had once seen one of them you could always recognize the others, but only Pauline possessed what amounted to beauty.

"The one least fitted to make use of it, of course," as Gertrude was in the habit of complaining.

To do her justice, she did her best to instruct the deficient one, and to help her to make the most of her charms, as she said, "for the credit of the family." The credit of the family weighed heavily on Gertrude's shoulders, and most of her actions were designed to uphold it in some manner or other. She was very industrious and very efficient, and where the comfort of the house would have been without her no one cared to consider. So if they laughed at her creed with its many

petty restrictions, its tiresome obligations, they did not resent it. Through long association they were in fact all more or less imbued with it. "What Gertrude said" ruled the household, and what "people would think" ruled Gertrude.

Gertrude waited on them all when no one was by, because they were younger than she was. For this reason they could not complain at being required to wait on her, because she was older than they were, on the rather rare occasions when they had company. They did it with a pretty show of deference, with the smiles and easy confidence that made all they did attractive. And afterward they laughed at her, and Gertrude joined in the laugh.

There was no mother; she had died some five or six years previously, and always the mere effort to live had seemed to absorb her entire stock of energy. And Mr. Ayres was known even by his daughters as "the dear old figurehead." "We keep him to look at, he's so very ornamental," they would explain. Thus Gertrude's sway was undisputed; in her small kingdom she was paramount.

But she had her limitations; a difficulty in addition was one of them. She looked up relieved from the blank paper before her when Pauline came in.

"Oh, Pauline," she began.

But Pauline had a letter in her hand and business of her own to preoccupy her.

"Ger, dear, what do you think? Everard is coming. I've just heard from him, and I can't imagine what he means, it's such a jumble."

"Just tell me what twelve yards at four-three would be?"

"Ger, dear!"

"It won't take you a minute."

"It will—I can't think—twelve fives are sixty, and sixty pence—oh, I don't know. Twenty pence are one and eightpence, thirty pence are two and sixpence, forty pence are three and fourpence, fifty pence are four and twopence, sixty pence—five shillings! It's five shillings, and you must take off the twelve farthings; but Ger, do listen——"

"I will, in a moment: just tell me what twelve farthings make?"

"Ger, dear! Twelve farthings are threepence. Take it from five shillings—oh, let me, or you'll never be done. Eightpence? no, ninepence. Four and ninepence. *Now*, Ger."

"It isn't enough. I've only four shillings. I can't have that cotton dress I told you about after all. I must have twelve yards at the very least, mustn't I?"

"To be frilly."

"What a shame! It would have been sweet."

"I haven't a sou."

"You never have," Gertrude reminded her.

"Oh, but we'll get it. Bella has some, and we'll make her lend it you. You've been such a darling to me over my clothes, you must have your dress."

"It's very light; perhaps it's rather late for it after all. The weather may change any time now," said Gertrude regretfully.

"It is a little late perhaps," said Pauline, "but I

want you to have it so; we must manage it." For the moment she seemed forgetful of her letter. Pauline always passionately desired those she loved to have even the slightest thing they wanted.

But Gertrude got up from the table. "We'll see," she said. "Your letter, Pauline? What's this about Everard?"

She sat perched on the window-ledge, the window thrown open behind her, her slight figure framed by wind-rocked festoons of Virginia creeper. From this informal throne she had administered laws of her own making hundreds of times; she had sat in judgment there on hundreds of domestic matters with the calm airy confidence in her own ability which always distinguished her. Her forehead was puckered, a trick she shared with Pauline, and she gave the matter in hand her whole attention, as was her inveterate habit. The letter certainly was jumbled; its obscurity of phrasing being further added to by Pauline's method of skipping, with a good deal of hesitation and many very charming blushes, "the pretty bits."

But the gist of it seemed to be that they might expect Everard to tea, close on the heels of his letter; and that he had news of importance to communicate, so that Pauline must be prepared to show herself his "own brave girl."

That last, quite a pretty bit, slipped out, and Pauline looked up hastily across her letter to see how Gertrude took it.

Pauline's love affair was the only one that Gertrude did not treat with outspoken scorn, and Pauline could

never forget that until lately she had always echoed much of the scorn, at least in words. But Gertrude was idly tapping the wainscoting with a restless heel. She did not speak.

In the pause something, she hardly knew what, began to fasten on Pauline. Tragedy began to stare at her out of the page that Everard had left blank. Her face grew white.

"Gertrude," she said, "what can he mean? I'm frightened."

"I expect it's just—nothing," said Gertrude.

"Why should it be nothing? Why should he frighten me for nothing?"

"Because he's a man, my dear, and does that sort of thing unconsciously," said Gertrude, with extreme moderation for her.

"I don't think Everard would. He knows how silly I am like that."

"Knows it and plays on it," Gertrude thought; but what she said was: "Things look so much more serious written than they are intended to look. It's probably just nothing, as I said. Why, you saw him two days ago, or is it three? If he did not mention it then, it can't be a very important affair to make a fuss about, you may be sure. Most likely he's got some rubbishy present, another monumental cruet perhaps, instead of that check he was expecting—who was he expecting it from? Uncle something? I always told him he wouldn't get it, he made too many plans for spending it. And if he hasn't got it and you have to moderate your honeymoon plans a little—why, there are worse trials than

that, aren't there, Pauline? You'll be together wherever you are; that's the great thing, isn't it, dear?"

"Yes, oh, yes. But do you think it can be only a trifle like that?" Too plainly she did not think so herself.

Gertrude moved from her perch to the side of her sister, standing irresolute and drooping. All Gertrude's movements were decided and purposeful; there was always something restful as well as compelling in her complete self-reliance. She laid a hand on the younger girl's arm. Pauline's beautiful face, the face of a mystic, a dreamer of dreams, was set. The pupils of her eyes were dilated; in their depths was the look, partly wild, wholly pathetic, which Gertrude knew so well; which she understood better than any one else, at any rate, how to dispel.

"Don't be a goose," she said, no trace of her usual rather dictatorial tone in her voice. "The worst sort of news he wouldn't be coming to tell you himself. And he'll be here directly to explain. Run upstairs and change your dress; don't dawdle, or he'll be here before you're ready. Luckily there's a cake for tea—an extra special cake, Pauline. Go, dear. I'll get out the best teacups for Mary and come up. My hair is tumbling down as usual, I expect."

But when she had hurried Pauline off she stood still a moment in the middle of the shabby little sitting-room before going to marshal forth from her china-cupboard the cherished best teacups. Her mouth was drawn into a hard, uncompromising line, her hands were clenched; it was a gesture all who knew her well were very familiar with.

"Careless idiot!" she thought, "that's just what he'll be forever doing. He's no more fitted to take care of her than—than fly. She's brave enough to face a trouble when it comes, but she can't bear suspense and thinking of things beforehand." Her mouth softened; her thought almost voiced itself in a dry, strangled sob. "Pauline, why must you leave me? No one will understand you as I do."

For Gertrude the strong, the practical, had her romantic side with the weakest of us. She guarded it jealously from sight, or thought she did, but it was there and always had been—her fostering love, her very real admiration for her sister Pauline. Something that was helpless in Pauline had appealed to her and held her the younger girl's slave and protector from the time when they were babies together.

This giving her sister up to the care of a man she honestly despised as selfish and incompetent—which was indeed her estimate of most men—was the hardest thing that life had forced on her so far. There was no hint of surrender in her attitude toward fate, but she told herself that nothing would ever be quite so hard to her again.

VI

But although Pauline opened the door to him herself, although she begged him for his news first of all, the news hinted at and then withheld in his letter, Everard still put off the telling.

"Not now, sweetheart," he said, "not yet." He kissed her troubled face, kissed her hair as he might have kissed, to quiet it, an importunate child, and drew her into the sitting-room at the end of the narrow passage that masqueraded as a "hall"—shielding himself from her further pleading with Gertrude and her tea-things.

Gertrude shook hands with him in the formal manner she rather reserved for Everard and generally forgot to maintain after the first ten minutes or so. She looked at him for a moment with her clear, steady eyes, and then past him at Pauline, and she saw at once that Everard had not explained himself so far. But she made no allusion to the letter. Interference between Pauline and her lover was an indulgence Gertrude resolutely denied her ready tongue.

"Sit down," she said; "the girls won't be a minute, and I'll make the tea." She proceeded to busy herself with her steaming kettle and her tea-caddy, and Everard sat down willingly enough, watching her preparations—

she did things so neatly that it was always a pleasure to watch her—and talking idly as he did so. The atmosphere of the shabby room was a very genial one; it was the girls' room, littered with their belongings, for the vigorous tidying up which Gertrude insisted on for the rest of the house was relaxed in its favor. Although Everard was still treated to the best teacups, on the occasions when he gave notice of his coming, he had, at an early stage, petitioned to be let off the dignity of drawing-room teas.

"Everything is so much jollier in your little den," he had said.

And in spite of the troubled face Pauline brought to its commencement this meal proved as merry as many others he remembered there. When Gertrude deliberately chose to be gay it was difficult to resist her; Pauline and Everard made no effort, and Bella and Bee and Babs suspected no reason for doing so. Laughter filled the room, careless heart-whole laughter and good fellowship.

"You are a jolly lot, you girls," Everard said, swinging Bee's tail of plaited hair with brotherly unconcern for her protests. As an only son he keenly felt the difference between the close companionship of these girls and his own lonely home life; he delighted, sitting among them, to remember that the prettiest of them all was going to be his life's companion, to rid him of the loneliness forever. He did not in the least realize how Pauline always followed rather than led the gaiety; how she echoed the mood of others whenever it was a question of merrymaking. Little Bee, sitting now on the

arm of his chair and coaxing her pigtail out of his clutches; Babs, her twin, dancing to and fro while she rained friendly abuse at him, a lithe long-legged syren in a much abbreviated skirt; Bella, much older than the twins, yet very newly grown up, with her many carefully aired conceits; and Gertrude, with the laugh that belied half her actions, were all of them just what he believed Pauline to be, were all imbued with the spirit she seemed to share simply through association—Pauline, who was one of them and yet not of them.

"Darling boy, you're hurting me; let me go!" cried pretty Bee.

"Let her be! let her be!" Babs urged; she had discovered for herself a joke in the words years ago, and happy Babs could still laugh every time she produced it.

"Babs, how can you? You dreadful little creature," Bella asked, but her question held a smile.

"Ger, dear," they all insisted, "please rescue her. She'll look so plain without her tail. She won't match. We can't have an odd pair of twins." But Gertrude refused to do battle, and in the end Babs was forced to add her alternate blows and wheedling to Bee's, while her own tail of shining hair was held out of danger by obliging Bella.

"Now," they called, when by stratagem the captive was free at last, "come and hold him in a close embrace, Pauline, please. We've our lessons to do, and can't be hindered any more."

"We don't love you, you're too naughty," they assured him—"only a tiny bit, for Pauline's sake. Oh!

poor darling! Doesn't he look miserable? Just a tiny, tiny bit for *yourself*, then." They lowered their shrill voices to whispers, whispers of the stage variety, standing one on either side of him and quite oblivious already of their tempting tails so convenient to his hands.

"We're much nicer to you than she is?" they questioned, nodding at their sister. "Aren't we? Just say we are." And then they kissed him suddenly, a kiss for either side of his fair, smooth head, and raised laughing flushed faces, dancing, mischievous eyes, to Pauline.

"We're two," they explained, "that's why he has to love us best—we're twice as nice. However could he help it? You can not help it, can you, darling boy?"

But Gertrude drove them remorselessly forth to their lessons. Presently, Everard hardly knew when it happened, she and Bella too had disappeared. And he was alone with Pauline and the delayed explanation of his letter. Pauline whom he loved, and the shadow that he shrank from and dreaded.

For a few minutes neither of them spoke, and the silence seemed ominous, almost unbearable, after the merry noise that had so lately filled the room. It turned Pauline white; to break the strain, or perhaps simply because he could not bear to sit still any longer, Everard jumped up, moved restlessly to the mantelpiece, and hunted about there for matches to light a cigarette. He could not find any, but he had some in his pocket all the time; he produced those and lit one, and his cigarette by its aid. His fingers were not steady; he held the match awkwardly and burnt them.

"Dash the thing!" he exclaimed irritably, and flung

the match into the empty grate. "I can't do a thing to-day."

He drew an easy chair up to the open window, flung himself into it, and held out his hand to Pauline. It was a wide, shabby old chair, uncertain as to its springs, but comfortable enough to those who understood how to adapt themselves to its peculiarities, and there was plenty of room at his side for Pauline.

She came at once, obedient to his gesture. She sat leaning a little forward, one hand on his knee. Her head was bent and Everard could no longer see her face. He put his hand on hers for a moment and moved it away again. All his actions were jerky; he was rapidly working into a highly nervous state. Pauline's dumbness, her air of painful expectancy, seemed paralyzing and wildly exciting him at the same time, if such a combination could be possible.

"Everard," Pauline said at last. "What is it? Tell me. Everard, dearest, I will be brave, only tell me," she urged again.

He took the cigarette out of his mouth, tossed it through the window, and put both his hands, cold in spite of the warm evening, on her warm fingers.

"Sweetheart, they say I must go away. They say we can't be married now, after all," he blurted out. He had planned his speech too elaborately beforehand. All he had meant to say had utterly forsaken him and he had only these bald words left in which to break his news to her.

He felt her fingers flutter under his, caught a low, wordless cry, and that was all. She did not even turn

to look at him; he sat quite still waiting—he could not for the moment tell what he was waiting for—and then he spoke in a tone of intense irritation.

"For heaven's sake say something, Pauline! Haven't you anything to say to that?"

"Tell me—tell me what it all means," Pauline persisted. "I can not understand. I—I—oh, *tell me,* Everard, and I will try not to make a fuss to distress you. My poor boy, wouldn't I spare you the telling if I could?"

Suddenly she moved, flung her arms round him and kissed him. As their lips met, the turmoil of Everard's spirit seemed to subside—his agitation faded.

Pauline took up her former position. "Now," she said, "now."

"Sweetheart," Everard smiled. "How well you understand! How trustful you are! A man would be the worst sort of cad who could abuse your trustfulness."

He coughed, almost for the first time since he had entered the house, cleared his throat, clasped her hand more firmly, and began to speak with every appearance of ease.

VII

"It's—of course it's a most confounded nuisance," Everard began, "but I suppose we must go through with it—I suppose there's no way out. You know I've never been very robust; I've told you!"

She stooped to kiss the hand that covered hers, pressed her cheek against it, and sat up again.

"Poor boy, and I'm so strong!" she sighed.

"Darling one!" Everard said, and went on. "There's nothing much the matter; I've got through my schooling all right, a precious lot of it too, for the Dad would have it, and through the hospital and the exams and all that, but I've often been dicky; as a kid I had some nasty turns. There's always been this cough, a bit of a worry, but none of it would count much, perhaps, if it wasn't for—" he seemed to stick.

"Everard, I know; your mother!"

"Yes," he said, "my mother. Heredity and consumption are such an old combination, they've run in harness so long. We can't shake ourselves altogether free of the association yet."

"Oh, Everard! Everard!"

"Hush, dear one, hush! On my honor there's nothing to worry about, so far. I'll swear it, if you like. I'm not any worse; I've often felt much more seedy and taken no notice. I shouldn't have taken any notice now,

just gone on and pulled through with it all right—I generally am all right if I'm enough occupied. But the old Dad's as nervous as a woman—always has been—and you see he had an awful blow in my mother's death to unnerve him for the rest of his days. Humphrey Martin has been staying for a couple of days at our place—I've often told you about Martin?"

"Yes."

"He's just as conceited as they make 'em, a regular crank too, but a first-rate man in his profession—I must say that for him—and very wrapped up in the Governor, who thinks there's no one like him. Well—between them they've been pitching into me, and the end of it was Martin set to work to overhaul me, as he calls it, and he found——"

"Dearest! dearest!"

He pressed her hand reassuringly. His own was quite steady and not so icily cold now.

"Nothing bad, Paulie. Only constitutional weakness and that sort of thing; a tendency in the wrong direction, but nothing at all immediately alarming. Only you see, if we neglected it——"

"We won't; we can't neglect it, Everard."

"It's not a safe thing to neglect, of course," Everard said soberly. "Later on all the care in the world might be unavailing, but a little precaution now would probably work wonders."

"Oh! what is to work the wonders?" Pauline asked.

"Martin has a plan, I'm coming to that. To do justice to Martin, I must say he has a plan ready to fit every emergency, and most of them work out effectively. I

don't like him, but he's a clever chap. He's most awfully strong on this, and he's thoroughly infected the Governor, and the two of them flatter themselves they've pretty well fixed it up already. This is it—it seems he knows some eccentric Johnnie, with more money than sense, who is crazy to explore unknown seas in a sailing yacht that he's been building and fitting up for the purpose. According to Martin the yacht is a perfect miracle of modern contrivance and finish, and worth a king's ransom in itself. The owner has his crew all engaged, he's ready to be off in fact, but health is not his strong point either, and he's anxious to add a medical man to the number of his employees to act as companion during his better days and a prop to his hours of sickness; you see?—treated as one of the family and all that. And what do you think? These millionaire fellows do beat everything for pure cheek, I must say. He'd met Humphrey Martin about twice, took a violent fancy to him, looked him up and set to work to fairly bully him into accepting the post! Martin! who's an absolute mole for work, burrows into it night and day, and has worked himself up a West End practise and a reputation that he wouldn't exchange for a dukedom! I should like to have seen old Humph refusing the proud position of bear-leader, upon my word I should!"

Pauline found it impossible to detach her thoughts from the main issue sufficiently to consider Dr. Martin in any way except just so far as he might be a help to Everard.

"But he's going to see him again, now?" she asked. "He's going to propose you?"

"That's it. Or rather he's going to see him again and insist on his taking me; that's more Martin's style. The man wants some one; there's no earthly reason, from his point of view, why I shouldn't be that one. I can go all right, I've no doubt of it, if I decide to."

"And Dr. Martin thinks——?"

"Oh! Martin and the Dad both look on it as *the* thing, a chance in ten thousand. If anything can set me straight for life it would be a three months' voyage now, they're both cocksure of it. Of course of the two, if they differed, one would risk one's money on Martin's opinion. He's quite a young man, barely middle-aged anyway, right in the swing and rush of things, and what's more, has pushed himself there by sheer ability. But the Pater's no fool—too humble-minded to go far, but knows what he's talking about."

"Everard, you haven't their experience, but you're a doctor too; what do *you* think?"

It seemed to Pauline that it was the first time she had even faintly realized the medical man in Everard, but that now she realized it for the moment, at any rate more strongly than anything else about him. The opinions he had quoted had impressed hers strongly, but she found herself waiting breathlessly for an opinion which held vastly more importance to her. She turned a little to look at him, scrutinizing him narrowly, engrossed entirely by this new aspect of him.

Everard spoke slowly, very much as if he would have preferred not to speak. Yet what she had asked for he gave her.

"I think with them," he said. "Before God, Pauline, I don't want to, but I can't help it!"

Now it was his turn to look at her. Perhaps he could hardly have put words to what he expected to see, but it was something quite different to what came.

Pauline's eyes—excitement, highly wrought resolve banishing all fear or hesitation from their depths—looked straight into his.

"There is no question about it," she said steadily; "you must go, my darling."

For a moment relief filled Everard to the exclusion of anything else.

"What a little brick you are, sweetheart," he exclaimed. "You are always surprising me, Paulie; I didn't know you could be such a brick."

"You must get well, quite well," she said.

But while she spoke another thought came to him, another view of the case. A doubt, unworthy but overwhelming, seized him, and he proceeded to put words to it almost as it arose.

"You don't seem finding it very hard to let me go," he said. "Isn't the postponement of our wedding and the separation and—and the rest of it, going to be much to you after all?"

"But what could they be," she asked, "compared with you? Aren't you everything—just all the world to me—just everything? I couldn't part with you for the sake of any one else, not now—oh, I couldn't! But for yourself—I can do it for your sake, dearest—to make you well again—to—to *keep* you, Everard!"

She got up, standing in front of him, meeting his

ungenerous silence with clasped hands, with piteous, tragic eyes.

"Don't you see if I tried to keep you—if—if I succeeded in keeping you, I might be your murderess?"

He caught her to him, drawing her strongly, but tenderly, down into his embrace.

"Darling, how you do exaggerate!"

"You thought I did not care!"

"I was a wretch, a selfish beast." Then with a man's first unfailing instinct he groped for some excuse, found a little lame one, set it on its feet and dragged it into service.

"I hate to leave you so," he whispered. "If I must go, I want so badly to take my wife as well."

But with her face against his, Pauline gave him his sentence of banishment.

"You *must* go," she sobbed. "But oh! come back strong! Come back soon to me!"

VIII

PRESENTLY, when they were calmer, they called in Gertrude and explained the fresh development of affairs to her. And it was news which Gertrude found it hard to listen to, since it was so plainly necessary to keep the thing that had first started into her mind entirely out of her expression or her speech.

This is what she thought: she was going to have Pauline a little longer! She was not going to be called upon to part with her just yet, after all! Then she turned her eyes from Pauline's tear-stained face, from Everard's elaborately gloomy aspect; turned to a minute inspection of the trails of Virginia creeper half covering the window, half blotting out the bare unlovely little garden. Safeguarded thus, she managed to say the things she was expected to say, until she had so warmed up to the part that she could even risk looking at them. Truly they were too engrossed to be very critical, and she took further courage and comfort from that obvious fact.

Gertrude was always especially severe with herself on the question of selfishness. She considered it the vice with which she had least sympathy; she said with frequency that she hated it above everything. But in reality, and without knowing it, she hated the appearance

of selfishness even more, perhaps, than the thing itself. And it certainly would have seemed very unkind, selfish even, to rejoice openly before such trouble and distress as Pauline and Everard unfolded for her consideration; her precaution was not at all uncalled for.

And soon enough her old lifelong care and solicitude for the younger sister went far to dim that first feeling of relief. A thing they did not either of them put into words—although between them they put so much—presented itself to her with alarming distinctness. What if this voyage did not after all work the wonders that were expected of it? What if Everard only came back again to the thing he was flying from?—to the assured impossibility of any real escape from it?

In that case there could be no marriage with him for Pauline, and what would that mean to her? Gertrude, who marveled over the matter in and out of season, who spent herself wondering how any one could really care two straws for this Everard Lomas, honestly believed that to lose him would mean a broken heart for the pretty sister she loved so faithfully.

With that prospect newly confronting her, she now found herself obliged to assume greater cheerfulness than she felt, rather than less.

While they were still talking, Mr. Ayres's latchkey was heard in the door; it was a house where very little that happened escaped a hearing, for the builders had been particularly indulgent toward the inquisitively minded. He came into the room almost immediately, with Bee and Babs on either arm and Bella close behind him, and having kissed the other two girls and shaken

hands with Everard, all in the heartiest manner, he sank into the old easy chair the young man vacated at his coming.

"Well," he said, looking round him, "it's good to be with you—good to be home!" It was one of the pretty things he seldom omitted to produce at the appropriate moment, although he was a man who used his home but sparingly, actually spending as little time in it as possible.

Even Bee and Babs knew that, yet their young voices were the first to answer him.

"You dear! you sweet! It's lovely to have you," they cried in pretty chorus.

But Mr. Ayres, looking round, detected at once the shadow on the faces of his elder daughters; he was as quick in intuition as Pauline, only he more frequently found occasion to hide his knowledge. To-night he attacked the shadow, however, and was soon in possession of Everard's story. He treated it with a characteristic, airy hopefulness that yet left behind it nothing to sting unkindly.

He drew Pauline, who was standing by him, on to his knee; took her by the chin and looked affectionately into her face. Then he looked at Everard.

His estimate of Everard Lomas coincided very nearly with Gertrude's, but he also considered him—like Gertrude again—in many ways a good match for Pauline, if she must be mated. And what there was of prudence in him leaned to the opinion that he had but small right to interfere with any future his girls might arrange for themselves, since he had failed to make provision for

them himself. And his knowledge of his own character did not lead him to suppose that he would achieve, in his latter years, a thing he had shown no signs of accomplishing so far. And then if Pauline loved him! The vagaries of love formed a theme he often ornamented very cleverly in conversation—as he could most things—but which he never professed to understand.

"You can't expect us to feel for you as deeply as we might," he said now, still looking at his future son-in-law, "if you were not going to leave so much behind you. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, eh, Gertrude? And we can't grieve overmuch at a chance that keeps our baby at home a little longer, can we? This is our real baby, you know, Everard—you may think Babs is, but you're no such thing, are you, Babs? You're just an old woman, masquerading in a pigtail that Paulie ought to be still wearing. Paulie, who pretends she's ready to be married! They tell me you've got a model housekeeper—you stick to her, my boy; you'll find you still need her."

"It's only a little put off, Daddie," Pauline interrupted him with, looking brighter already.

"We're thankful for little mercies in this house," he laughed. "As for you, my dear fellow, you'll come back looking such a fine, hearty chap, we shall hardly recognize you. Your father's in the right to persuade you to go—tell him I think so—absolutely right. It'll do you a world of good every way—why, at your age, I'd have given all I possessed for such a chance. You want him quite set up for life before you undertake the care of him, don't you, Pauline?"

"I want him well before anything," Pauline said.

"That's it, of course," her father answered encouragingly. "That's it, eh, Everard?"

"Yes," Everard admitted. "I suppose we must put it like that."

"Yes, most certainly. You must go and get well—get yourself turned into a strong man. Why, what is three months? Bless my soul, you'll be back full of blustering rude health, to claim Pauline, before we've half realized you've started. And you can put up with us here a little longer, Paulie?"

"Oh, Daddie, I've never wanted——"

"You mean you've always wanted to eat and keep your cake; we all do, dear."

He pinched her rounded chin again; toyed with a little curl, so like the curls of his boyhood. In a perfectly irresponsible fashion Mr. Ayres was extremely fond of all his daughters; he did not apparently feel himself bound to think for them, but he thought a great deal of them, and always with the utmost pleasure. Yet, like Gertrude's voice, his voice had one special note in it that was soft and tender, and dedicated to Pauline; his heart had its warmest corner reserved for the daughter whose good looks flattered him particularly as his direct gift to her, and whose clinging, affectionate ways touched him most nearly.

"We'll take great care of her, we'll keep her safe for you, Everard, my boy," he said. "Eh, Gertrude? Eh, girlies?"

And there followed the ready response that never failed him, the sweet, high-pitched chorus easily led by

the energetic treble of Bee and Babs, that was so entirely his to command.

"We love to keep her! We love to keep you, Pauline," the twins assured their sister. "And when she's gone," they told their father, "when she really *has* to go, we'll be your favorite daughters, won't we? You know you've promised us? You do remember, don't you? We'll be your favorites, and you'll have to love us twice as much, because we're two instead of one! You won't be able to help it, will you? Will you?"

For although he gave his family but a small share of either his income or his consideration, judged wholly by results, by their opinion of him, Mr. Ayres's methods seemed justified. The five girls were perhaps particularly united, but most of all were they one in their openly expressed and charming worship of their handsome father.

IX

But things did not seem quite so easy, quite so bright, when, later on, in the sheltering darkness, Pauline clung to Everard at the gate, and felt his arms about her; his arms that always seemed to encircle her whole world while they still held her fast. The three months' separation began again to assume its former overwhelming proportions, the shadow grew and grew until the little parting of to-night faithfully portrayed to their young minds all the bitterness and pain of the parting yet to come.

Everard's last kiss on Pauline's upturned face was followed by a succession of last kisses, each more despairing, more impassioned than the last; they fell like summer rain upon her lips, her eyes, her soft, warm hair—with months of denial confronting him he could be prodigal of kisses. When, with a supreme effort, he tore himself away from her, he had to hurry resolutely down the road; he knew she was still there, still peering through the darkness after him; and he would have given much to go back to her to try to catch again the mingled pain and pleasure of those last few minutes.

And he did turn eventually, retracing his steps with all the haste he could accomplish, but urged to it by a fresh thought just representing itself to him.

When he reached the gate, Pauline was there as he

knew she would be, but Gertrude, who had come out to see what was detaining her, was now standing there too.

"Gertrude, I'm glad you're here," Everard panted, "I want to ask you both what you think. We know we shan't change—and all that. Why shouldn't we be married first—before I sail? Why shouldn't we? It would seem better so. It wouldn't seem so hard."

"No, no!" Gertrude exclaimed, surprised out of the reserve she had forced on herself. "We want to keep her just as she has been for this little while"—her voice fell almost to its normal point of calmness. "I believe it would be harder—for you both," she ended.

"Pauline?"

"Oh, Everard, I don't know!" Pauline said, "I don't know!"

Standing close between them she felt all her lover's agitated longing to make her more securely his; but Gertrude's arm was pressing hers, and she felt almost as keenly Gertrude's passionate disapproval of the plan. Her heart drew her one way, but only a little more urgently than the influences and affections of all her past life drew her in another. Half-stifled for the moment with the conflicting wills of the two people she loved most in all the world, she spoke truly when she said she did not know her own mind in the matter.

And then Everard, without any further opposition or discussion, dropped his latest project as quickly as he had taken it up.

"I had forgotten," he said, his voice grown suddenly dull and flat. "I had no right to suggest it—forgive me, but I had quite forgotten. We'll leave it as it is.

You are right, Gertrude; it wouldn't do. We'll have the wedding when I get back—if—if—" His cough, often so in the way, came bravely to his rescue. "*When* I get back, Pauline."

He hurried off again, and when he was gone Pauline turned to Gertrude.

"If—if what? What did he mean?" she asked, but Gertrude did not answer her.

"I know what he meant," Pauline said. She loosened her arm from her sister's. "I know what he meant," she repeated drearily. But still Gertrude did not answer. She clenched her hands at her sides in helpless fury, because she had no answer ready.

But the final good-by, which in the very nature of things they had been bound to anticipate, yet came to them with nothing, after all, of its fine edge of anguish abated. They were extremely young, tremendously in love, determined to see no joy in a life that did not confer the daily companionship of each other; and life had played them such a sorry trick when hope had shone the brightest. So, if they magnified their little woes by the glass of their desires, if in looking forward to a short three months in their hearts they called it an eternity, who that has loved while hot, rebellious youth still held them shall wonder? Who, at any age, shall blame?

"Pauline," Everard questioned jealously, "shall I find you just the same?"

"Oh, just the same! You must believe it."

"I do—I do believe it. And you won't," he added,

laughing faintly at himself, "be too nice to any one else while I'm away?"

"I shan't be able to," she assured him. "You've made me forget the way to be very nice to any one but you."

"Is that true? Then I'm jolly glad of it," he exclaimed boyishly.

But while he jested, her quick conscience had overtaken Pauline. "And I haven't always been nice to you," she sighed. "Often I've been quite horrid."

"Why will you be so foolish, dear?" he asked. "You've always been far too good to me, far better and sweeter and more forgiving than I deserve. You are now. You know as well as I do that I ought to break off our engagement before I go, that—with things as they are—that I ought to leave you free instead of bound; instead of trying to bind you tighter and tighter. It's true, Pauline. You know it's true; we both do, dearest"—his voice touched a note that rang heroically —"that I ought to do it."

"It isn't true, Everard; you could not do it."

"Somehow," he ended lamely, "that is the real truth —I can not do it. It seems that I am the most awful coward ever born."

"But you are mine?"

He laughed, half diverted. "That's my question, Paulie! Yes, you know how much."

"Then how could you take from me what's mine, without my leave?"

"Who's wriggling now, sweetheart?"

"Call me your wife," she coaxed.

"My foolish wife," he whispered into her bright hair.

"Then could you put your wife from you?"

"Heaven help us, Pauline, *no*," Everard cried.

"There is no need," she said, looking up at him. "It would be too hard for us both. It—isn't it impossible? And I—oh, I am glad it is impossible, Everard, for I could not part with you for always. Dearest, you will come home quite strong—I feel it—I do feel it——"

Yet the feeling was not deep enough, it seemed, to keep the mistiness out of her eyes.

"It's hard that you must go," she sobbed. "But it will do you so much good, my darling," she ended bravely. "You're coming back quite strong."

Thus they spent the time in April changes, in tears and wan sad smiles, in love expressed and fond assurances of love's continuance, the little time, the few poor dwindling, insufficient minutes that were left to them. If Pauline wept childish tears at the prompting of her woman's heart, if Everard's brand-new manhood failed to keep him altogether dry-eyed, are there any still alive in this old world to be surprised?

He took her face between his hands; gazed at it long and steadily as if to impress indelibly on his mind the features he admired so thoroughly, and believed himself already so familiar with. All that her face signified he missed unknowingly, yet, given the skill, he might have painted her portrait from memory, and with absolute faithfulness in detail. But with his senses sharpened by the impending parting, he looked at her now with much of the fervor and distinctness of a first impression—such an impression as he was capable of receiving.

THE PARTING

Pauline's hair, the curly hair he loved to kiss, was loosely fastened back in a low knot. Its color was hard to tell because it was many-colored—red without being red, brown without being brown, and with golden threads in it to catch and hold the sunshine. He knew that her face was beautifully shaped, that her mouth with its plaintive droop was a thing to tantalize, a thing to dream of; that her delicately tinted skin would have rendered a plain face alluring. All this he knew and remembered when he was not with her; but looking into her eyes, as he presently looked, he could, after all, think of little beyond the mystery and beauty of their depths. He knew that they were set rather far apart, that they were a soft, light brown in color, that they were thickly and darkly lashed; but to his sight they were always dark and unfathomable and wholly wonderful; just that—and who would ask for more? But there was more—the thing to hold him closest; for he saw himself there, drowned in the love she had for him.

"Dear eyes!" he cried, and set them free from his own that he might kiss her mouth.

"Dear lips!" he cried. "I don't know what I love the most in you, Pauline; I love you all so much."

"Good-by," he whispered, kissing eyes and lips again. But the last kiss of all he gave to her hair.

"Good-by, Pauline."

"Good-by, good-by, Everard."

And in another moment he was gone; she stood alone.

"Oh, come back strong; come back soon to me!"

"God, how it hurts!" said Everard.

Pauline cried softly after him.

X

THUS it was that on the very day that should have seen his marriage with Pauline, Everard Lomas sailed without her on his quest for health. Instead of a bride he embraced the unknown; instead of following love he hunted a will-of-the-wisp. The simple domestic joys he had been closely contemplating he turned his back upon at the bidding of fate, and went out into exile, to a lonely search for a treasure he had no certain hope of ever finding.

Yet, whenever he lent his ear to them, winds and waves—Nature's boisterous physicians—freely promised him their healing. From the first they seemed to take him under their protection. "We'll send you back to her, back to her," they said, with every lurch of the vessel, with every sweet, salt kiss of spray. "We'll make a man of you, a man of you," they cried, and rocked him to sleep beneath the moon. "We'll teach you what it is to be a man!" they mocked, and woke him up to greet the dawn. "Ill—you're not ill; you're undeveloped," they snarled, and buffeted him till he panted, breathless. "Love—you don't know how to love yet! We'll show you when you're man enough," they shouted, and played at drenching him, played at knocking him down, and laughed and howled and flouted their powers in his face. But their promise was unvarying—"We'll take you back to her." They pledged their

faith to him in an ocean full of strong, health-giving waters.

After even the first few days Everard's fears for his future lessened; at the end of the first few weeks they had grown dim and far away; by the end of a couple of months he had almost forgotten that there had ever been any question of his ultimate recovery. By then he was assured that after his voyage he would surely marry Pauline, and all would be well for them both. And in the meanwhile he gave himself up to the good time, the fascinating, unexpected good time of the present.

Everard loved Pauline as much as a rather shallow, a rather selfish nature allowed him to, and in spite of his limitations it is only fair to assume that he loved her as dearly as the average man loves the woman he chooses, for the grand passions do not—and perhaps happily do not—come to all of us. But unawakened until now, at the root of his nature, lay the spirit of adventure which lies at the root of every man's nature, and helps to make him what he is.

He was young, and the sea called him; he was young, and freedom tempted him; he was young, and the glamor was not stripped from life—the world, the open, wonderful world was before him. Because he took joy in the thought—breathed in new vigor, new delight in living with every new day—he was not unfaithful to his love, but unconsciously faithful to the tradition which in the beginning gave man his world first and woman afterward.

But even to Pauline, who was so made that she felt

everything with a quite inappropriate acuteness, and who in this case felt all her own sorrow and Everard's too, even to her came back her smiles, the calmer, happier point of view.

Behind her love for Everard, during all their short engagement, had hidden her dread of a new and untried life. If only her lover would come back established in health, it was restful and pleasant to live on a little longer in her old familiar surroundings; to share a little longer the sheltered home life; to retain her place for a few short months more as the favorite daughter, the sister best beloved. Not only to give those dear to her what they wanted, but to say what they wanted her to say, to be to them what they wanted her to be, were passionate needs of Pauline's nature—a need which warred too often against an ingrained love of truth, and frequently served, by gaining the mastery, to give her real or fancied cause for self-reproach. But now, with Everard's almost daily influence removed, her sisters' claims on her gained a new importance. In the face of their appreciation of her continued presence there seemed something churlish even in her very natural grief; and so she managed to hide a few, and then a few more, signs of her distress; so she became more and more the old Pauline.

And after all it was so natural to be there! She seemed so fitted to this life, which was the only life she knew. With no absorbing pursuits of her own, Pauline's daily round was to fill up the gaps; to do the things the others left undone. Bella, Bee and Babs all employed her.

Bella, the third girl, taught in the mornings, and spent the money she earned on afternoon and evening art-school classes, to satisfy what she called her "artistic temperament." But Bella must be clothed; so Pauline finished the frocks of quaint and unpractical design which Bella arranged, and feverishly began and grew hopeless over—but always under Bella's strict supervision. Pauline helped the twins with their lessons, not so much because they needed her help, but because they liked and insisted on her companionship, and all the rest of her time was at Gertrude's disposal. "Ger, dear, what shall I do now?" was a question on her lips a dozen times a day. If Pauline's thoughts took turns which proved to other people unexpected, and were not even much under her own control, her actions were principally attributable to Gertrude. The occasions when she had taken any step, however slight, without seeking Gertrude's advice, without at least trying to accept Gertrude's point of view, were those only when Everard had stepped between them to impose his views and his will on hers.

And yet beneath her pliancy, her seeming readiness to take the way of others and make it hers, there was something immovable and hard to reach in her. "Pauline sees everything the wrong way round," the sharp twins would frequently explain; and however industriously she tried to efface her first impression, it was true that Pauline did generally jump to conclusions which were not those usually seized upon.

"I should have known you'd say *that*," was a thing often said of her by her candid family, and always in

reference to some statement quite opposed to the one in general favor. Her four sisters, upheld by numbers, found plenty to laugh at in what they called her weird ideas. "One of Pauline's," they would say, smiling and contemptuous, of something that seemed to Pauline herself too obvious for discussion, too much a matter of commonplace for any division of opinion. But for all that, her opinion would be airily condemned with a "Dear goose, that's only what you think."

But if they disagreed with her they loved her, making no stint in the expression of their love; if they could not convince her they ruled her—by loving her. It was an easy bondage, and after a little while she settled back into it restfully; it had held her, upheld her even, for so long. And Everard would soon be back. Only three months to wait—two months to wait—a month to wait—and then——!

But before the end of the appointed three months there came to her a disturbing silence, and then, in place of Everard, a delayed letter. The owner of the yacht had intended to make this voyage simply a trial trip, a short test of the vessel's powers. However, the trial had apparently exceeded in pleasurable excitement even his highly pitched expectations; and the model yacht, having more than fulfilled its promise, the voyage was to be extended, for the present, indefinitely.

The charm of a vagrant life on the high seas, which had fascinated his employer in prospect, had evidently proved catching. From his letter Pauline could plainly trace the hold it had gained on Everard.

"Dearest," he wrote, "if you could see how strong

I am already, if you could feel the glow this glorious free life puts into one, you would understand—you are so understanding that, as it is, I seem to hear you telling me to go on, to establish my recovered health for certain and for both our sakes. Your letters have been so brave and cheerful I can not help thinking I must be doing as you would wish and urge me to do, and indeed, dearest, it would be difficult to get away; from the nearest point that I could land now the journey home would be a serious expense and trouble. Besides that, it would be leaving a man who has been exceedingly considerate to me in a very shabby manner—you would not have me shabby, love?

"Pauline, such days we have and such nights! Oh! it is a glorious, glorious life. It needs only one thing to make it perfect—it needs only you!

"Dearest, we shan't be more than nine months gone altogether, at the most; more likely still it will not be much over six from the time we started. And I will write to you, sending the letters whenever any opportunity occurs, for we are to follow the unfrequented ways as far as possible.

"The worst of it all is that I can give you no directions as to where to write to me; that I must forego your precious letters. For you know the idea is that we should have no fixed route, that we should wander on as chance and the four winds lead us, to find—what heaven sends us! I think and hope I have collected all your letters so far, but from now we shall be quite 'at sea' as to our movements.

"How I shall miss your letters! But how, after this

separation, I shall love my wife when I get her! Pray for your wanderer, love, and his glad home-coming."

It was soon after the arrival of this letter that Pauline, who had borne up so wonderfully before, began to grow pale and listless; to lose interest in her old pursuits; to droop and fade. How many times in the weeks that followed she read the letter through and through—until the very wording grew meaningless—she could not have told. How many petitions she put up to a merciful God for the wanderer she could not have counted, but they outnumbered all her prayers for herself, and her prayers for herself were at this time very many.

But for his glad home-coming she never prayed.

XI

WHEN she was no more than fifteen years old Gertrude Ayres released herself from the tyranny of attendance at school and undertook, instead of further studying, the care of an invalid and incompetent mother, the guidance of her younger sisters, and the management and readjustment of the home generally. By the time she was sixteen her natural ability for domestic matters had so far transformed the thriftless, untidy household that even carping aunts and cousins, naturally on the look-out for flaws in one so young and so self-confident, were forced to see, even to admit, her precocious ability.

They spoke of her, behind her back, as providentially provided with the saving grace of an old head to surmount young untried shoulders; they called her "quite grown up," and so, indeed, she was—at least as fully grown up as she was to become for many years. Everybody in the family openly admired Mr. Ayres, although no one could have given a substantial reason for doing so, and the easy time she procured for her popular father was sufficient to win forgiveness—from her female relations—for many girlish airs and even her good management.

But the approval acceded to Gertrude by no means extended to Pauline; over her contrasting case there

were many head-shakings, and later on her "helpless ways" were much commented on; also behind Gertrude's back, for disparagement of her sister was known to have a dangerous effect on her.

"Quite a child still," people would say of Pauline even after her engagement, and then they would pause to wonder at the uneven development often to be seen among sisters. For, by women especially, taste and talent early shown in household government is generally supposed to accompany an advanced, a full-grown mind, on other matters; although it is more the exception than the rule that it does so. In reality Gertrude, at her present age of twenty-four, was hardly altered in any way from what she had been at sixteen, except in looks, and was actually as much younger than Pauline in some ways as she seemed older in others.

Yet this was a thing as little realized by Gertrude or Pauline as by their friends and relatives.

But if Gertrude was generally self-sufficient she was not infallibly so, and there were times when her own small life and the lives about her presented themselves to her as hopelessly tangled, beyond the power of her strong eager hands, her firm will, to straighten out. It happens to all of us—with varying frequency—and perhaps Gertrude was fortunate in having been for long so occupied that such considerations had failed to touch her closely until Everard Lomas came to supplant her in Pauline's heart. That such a thing could be, that Pauline could so readily put him beyond her while she herself altered in no particular, first turned Gertrude's thoughts to rebellion.

"But if he was as worthy of her as he ought to be, I should not mind," she told herself, honestly believing what she said.

Unfortunately the more she saw of Everard the less she was inclined to think well of him; his was not a disposition to attract her, and she was prejudiced. It must be admitted that she grew more and more prejudiced—and this was hardly Everard's fault—with every tear Pauline shed over parting with him.

That Pauline should suffer and that she should have no power to help her; that the power should lie, unexerted, in another's hands—could anything torture a nature such as hers more than that? Yet Gertrude was to meet greater than her present suffering—not wholly in kind, but in degree.

But first she gained a respite; as Pauline dried her tears her mind relaxed its angry tension, and in the acute pleasure of keeping her sister still at home quite a new and lenient view of the unsuspecting Everard came to her. She found it so much easier to think what she rather baldly called "nicely" of him with the sea dividing them.

And then came his letter announcing his extended voyage, his protracted absence, and Pauline was given back to her for longer than she had ever dared to hope for; and, by all her recent experience, surely Gertrude should have found further cause for relief, for rejoicing?

But how could she rejoice with Pauline growing white and silent and changed before her eyes? Pauline grieving herself sick and wan, and refusing to be comforted, refusing to be questioned?

Truly Pauline no longer cried, but the piteous strained look in her beautiful eyes, that Gertrude always used her best endeavors to dispel, became almost fixed in them. She would not own herself ill, would not admit even Gertrude into her confidence, would not so much as admit she had a confidence to bestow. Often she would grow childishly fretful over a word and then, at a word again, childishly repentant, and always in her sister's watchful eyes she was distressingly, bewilderingly changed.

Sometimes, with a visible effort, she would nerve herself to recapture something of her old attitude, to become once more the old Pauline; and this always happened when others were present and was invariably followed by an entire collapse when she was left alone again with Gertrude, a collapse she could not or would not explain.

Indeed Gertrude needed all her love and all her patience to help her in her dealings with Pauline in these days; days that had grown tedious, grown endless, that were formerly too short for the half she desired to cram into them. And beyond the days were the weary nights when they, too, began to spin themselves into a long-drawn torment of disquietude and unrest. For Gertrude, worn by anxiety and apprehension, had begun to lie awake at night for the first time in all her healthy, busy life.

In the barely furnished, shabby top room they had shared all their lives, the two sisters still slept in the small iron bedsteads that had succeeded the cribs of their babyhood; and always now, as she lay sleepless in

her bed against the wall, Gertrude could tell by the sounds of tossing in the bed whose foot projected under the window that Pauline was awake also. Yet she did not speak to her: her appeals had proved themselves so useless.

But one night, believing Gertrude asleep and the silent hours her own, Pauline's sobs broke upon the stillness, and then Gertrude could not bear it any longer.

She sat up. "Paulie," she cried, "come into my bed—come, dear."

As a child, whenever she felt ill in the night, or, as more often happened, felt frightened and distressed, it had always been Pauline's unfailing remedy to climb into Gertrude's bed to be rid of her ills or her fears in the comforting warmth of Gertrude's arms. And to this haven, although Gertrude had hardly expected it when she called to her, she came now.

For the strain of her secret anguish had become greater than she could bear; the silence insupportable. The time when she could do without her sister's help was fully over, but for a little while she lay still, the trembling in her limbs growing less violent, her sobs almost ceasing. Gertrude's touch brought her a little strength—the strength to delay minute by minute her pitiful confession and yet feel in anticipation some of the relief confession must surely bring.

But presently Gertrude began to speak, unconsciously using the words she so often had occasion to use long ago. Pauline recognized them, feeling in them all the beauty of the child's protecting love of the child which had grown and ripened with the passing years. "Tell

me, Paulie, what is it frightens you? Tell your Ger all about it," Gertrude said. "I'll help you, Paulie. Tell your Ger, and she'll make it right for you; she won't let you be frightened any more."

Pauline's was a trouble grown past all putting right; but that Gertrude would help her, as far as help could avail, she never for an instant doubted; and that was the reward Gertrude won by her years of devotion.

So it came about at last that, pressing closer in the strong embrace, Pauline gathered together the remnant of her courage; and with her face against her sister's face, with her sister's arms about her, brokenly whispered the story of her shame.

XII

But at first it seemed almost as if Gertrude's intelligence had snapped just when it was most needed; as if Pauline's words meant nothing to her. Her world had suddenly come to a standstill; her brain reeled; a terrible oppression was weighing her down. From under it she appealed frantically to Pauline.

"It isn't true! You must say it isn't true—isn't true!" she cried.

Pauline could only answer in what seemed to Gertrude idiotic fashion.

"Oh, it's true—quite true!"

"Don't say it, Paulie—it's horrible."

"Horrible and true," Pauline said. She was no longer in the mood to spare either herself or Gertrude. "Don't you understand?" she wailed. "Oh, it's true! true! true!"

"You can not know!" Gertrude said, fighting all her own powers of reasoning, all weight of Pauline's confession, and armed for her fight with no better weapon than a stupid denial of obvious facts. "How should you know?"

"I—oh, Ger, darling, I must know. I do know," Pauline said. All this time she was clasped by Gertrude's arms; now they suddenly relaxed their hold.

The weight had lifted from Gertrude's brain and the truth had come home to her.

With its coming she freed herself roughly from the younger girl's embrace. To get out of bed she was forced to climb over Pauline's prostrate form, yet in a moment she was standing on the floor. For what seemed to Pauline an eternity of tortured suspense, only Gertrude's labored breathing reached her. Then her voice rose harsh and passionate.

"May God forgive you, Pauline, for this disgrace you've brought upon us, for I never can!"

She began to pace up and down the room; barefooted she went, with hands clenched at her sides; her head throbbing, her eyes burning with unshed tears; all her tenderness drowned deep in a bottomless well of rage and disappointment. If not impossible to believe, as she had felt at first, it was all too terrible to be borne.

She flung wide the window; she must have more air. Panting, she hung out in her white nightdress, with her long, wind-lifted hair all about her, into the darkness of the night. There were a few faint stars in heaven, but not a ray of mercy anywhere.

Surely she had striven hard and in a good cause all her young life, and now the little castle of her dreams and hopes lay scattered at her feet. And it was Pauline's work—Pauline, whose nature she had looked up to with something akin to worship; all the while she had dominated her, protected her. From any one else, she told herself with truth, she could have borne the blow better than from Pauline.

She had given herself ungrudgingly to her younger

sisters and she had always thought so well of what she had gained for them—it had always seemed so worth the toil of gaining. And, indeed, hers had been a brave and unceasing struggle; given a reason at last for turning back to the study of her achievement, she grew full of a startled wonder at the difficulties she had fought with and conquered.

She had scraped and saved for long months to pay off the debts her mother had allowed to accumulate, and they had never been in debt since. Her father's home had been kept sweet and clean, although so much of the work it entailed had fallen to her own hands; there had always been a welcome in it, smiles and love to greet him. And his motherless girls had all been loved and cared for, especially Pauline—their pride, their beauty —his darling and hers!

Yes, she had done her best, and the doing had not been always easy. Yet she had worked so gladly—so gladly through everything—in spite of everything!

All she had ever demanded, in return for her work for them and her love of them, was that her bright, attractive sisters should stand upright and unashamed before the world; and particularly the little world most present, the infinitely small suburban world of Balham.

And now they would not even be looked upon as respectable. Gertrude Ayres was, in truth, younger than her years, and she knew no farther-reaching word of condemnation than that.

Her religion amounted simply to the unreasoning faith of a trustful child. She said her prayers through the week and went to church on Sundays because her mother

had prayed and attended church before her; because all the women she knew followed the same time-honored practises. And what she did her sisters did, and where she went they went also, and for the better honoring of God and her neighbors' opinion she had seen every Sunday that they were at their cleanest and freshest. But she was a conscientious worker and she had not been content with a merely surface purity for use once a week. To this day she took a fiercely maternal pride in the guilelessness of long-frocked Bella; in the innocency of long-legged Bee and Babs.

But how could she hope to keep Bella's sharp eyes shut any longer?—keep the pretty twins from the fateful tree of knowledge?

And all the while Pauline's sobs reached her from the bed against the wall. Oh the hopeless, rending, agonizing sound!

Those long-drawn sobs which shook Pauline had long ago grown beyond her control; but while she lay there—her face buried in the pillows, her body prostrate, submerged by her sorrow, without the strength or the will to move—her mind was still revolving round and round the endless circle which had filled it through the past weeks, the miserable weeks during which she had clung to silence as her only safeguard from others, from herself, knowing all the time just when it must inevitably fail her; knowing, foreseeing, all the added horror and distress that failure must bring her to.

There had been whole days when she lashed herself into a fierce hatred of Everard. Why—why had he left her to face all this alone? There had been days, dark

days, when she had only dumbly hated herself, when the burden of her seared conscience had outweighed everything else. And then at other times the consequences of her sin had seemed to parade themselves unsparingly, endlessly, before her excited imagination; and she had felt and seen, a hundred times, all Gertrude was feeling now; and beyond it all lay the awful knowledge that it was she who was bringing this misery upon her dear ones—she, Pauline—the petted favorite of the little home. Those had been days when thoughts of suicide had added their touch of madness to her overwrought brain; surely it would be better to end her life; to give it, her wretched, wretched all, a sacrifice to those she loved, and so to save them something—this, at least.

But she had not done it; and now, to serve that end at any rate, to shut them off from the knowledge of her worthlessness, it was too late. Why had she given it up; turned her fevered senses from the cooling waters and the peace they seem to bring to such sin-laden souls as hers? She had found a reason that had made it impossible—what was it? Among all her tumbled, tortured thoughts she had mislaid it. What had it been?

Ah, now she knew! Punishment, that was the word, the cue. Only through punishment could she achieve salvation; there lay the only way out of sin. Where had she heard that? She did not know, but her mind had accepted it blindly, unfalteringly, and so the peace of the waters had been denied to her, was denied to her still. Even for the sake of those she loved, who had so loved and cared for her, she dare not cut short her punishment—the one open road.

She must bear it all, for she had earned it all, even to Gertrude's bitter cry—that bitter cry! And she had known it must be so; that Gertrude, as well as all the rest, must shrink from her, upbraid her; yet her foreknowledge brought no healing to the wound when it came. Although Gertrude's decent narrow laws of life, stretched to their utmost, were not hers by nature, they were hers by adoption, by lifelong association. Even the law she had broken loose from was still a law and, broken, bound her with a twofold cord. The very justice of Gertrude's cry formed its bitterness, its sting. She had no excuse to raise. Neither for herself nor Everard could she offer vain excuses—in her pain she was dumb, and must remain dumb.

But almost worse than the pain was the loneliness; and this loneliness, in its present completeness, was a new torture.

In all the little trials of her past—her childish, girlish troubles—when had she stood alone? Had not Gertrude always been beside her, to fight her battles with her, more often for her?—when the trouble was past, beside her still, to cheer and comfort her back into peace, into happiness? And now she was facing a worse trouble than ever she had dreamed of, and she was quite alone. For Gertrude, standing resolute and motionless by the window, full of hard, righteous thoughts, was as far from her as Everard lost to her over the seas. And after all, it was Gertrude's help she turned to now with passionate longing—the help so often tried, so often proven.

A great craving beset her to join that dimly outlined white figure, so quiet, so unrelenting. To go on her

knees to it, to crouch about its feet, begging—no, not forgiveness—Gertrude had said she could never give her that, and Pauline had mutely accepted the word as final—but—she hardly knew what—yet something, some touch, some token, some sign out of those lost years of their love to help her through the blank dreary years before her.

But, although the longing grew and grew for this human succor in her overmastering distress, she did not move. Gertrude, walking uprightly and cleanly before the world, belonged now to another order of beings. She had no part with the fallen—none. And she, Pauline, must not be the one to strive to bridge that difference, a difference coming home to her for the first time in its fulness to-night. She moaned aloud, a wordless expression of the agony, marking her arrival at the lowest depths to which her nature reached. Dear God, the loneliness! She was not prepared for that!

Then slowly, stiffly, in the chill dawn, the white-robed figure moved from the open window, moved toward her. She buried her face lower in the pillows, breathless, hoping, waiting. But she dare not to herself say what she was hoping and waiting for; she waited too eagerly; hoped too much.

No! not too much! Gertrude—creeping across her, lying down cold and shaking beside her, stretching her arms out to her—Gertrude had come back to her—voiceless, but with open arms.

In their shelter, worn out by the tempest of her grief, soothed, hushed, Pauline sank gradually into an exhausted slumber.

But Gertrude lay wide-eyed. She had tried to harden her heart, to deafen her ears to the call of Pauline's helplessness, her need. But after this long time, these many years, wasn't it impossible? beyond her power? She watched the pale dawn strengthening to the light, the sunshine of the morning, and in her aching heart a frail light was growing and strengthening also. She remembered now that for this sister who had unmade a whole past for her, there was still remaining much for her to do.

BOOK II

THE RETURN

"Is she wronged?—To the rescue of her honor,
My heart!
Is she poor?—What cost it to be styled a donor?
Merely an earth's to cleave, a sea's to part!
But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her."

BROWNING.

"Face to face in my chamber, my silent chamber, I saw her:
God and she and I only, there I sat down to draw her
Soul through the clefts of confession—'Speak, I am holding
thee fast,
As the angel of resurrection shall do it at the last!'
'My cup is blood red
With my sin,' she said,
'And I pour it out to the bitter lees,
As if the angels of judgment stood over me strong at the last
Or as thou wert as these.'"

E. B. BROWNING.

BOOK II

I

WHEN Everard Lomas landed again in England he was barely a year older than when he started on his voyage; yet between the Everard who went away and the Everard who returned there appeared some startling differences, and outwardly, at any rate, the year had made a new man of him.

But the changes in him were not confined to the surface; for one thing, up to the time of his leaving England, he had never experienced a day of perfect health. Everything he had attempted he had been forced into carrying through at a greater expenditure of effort than should have been necessary for its accomplishment; and though not often incapacitated entirely, he was always more or less unfitted for the daily round that the existing state of things required of him. And the bodily weakness which had made work a weariness had cast its shadow over his pleasures too. He had not realized it, but even his love for Pauline lacked some of its warmest glow as the result of his own bad circulation. In spite of his father's devotion to him, his home had

been a lonely one; in spite of a fair average intelligence, his studies were a toil, and his recreations were few, because, when he was not studying, he was generally ill.

Physically, in fact, he was "below par," and since he was by no means an exceptional being, he was naturally "below par" both morally and mentally as well. It is difficult to be enthusiastic with a headache. It is almost impossible to appreciate life at its highest and best in a condition of unremitting tiredness. Some there are who, thus handicapped, have trained themselves to surmount such barriers to their true progress, and have even managed to outrun their fellows in the race; but Everard was not of them. His father had striven to bring him up unspoilt and unselfish, and he had given him the best education he could afford, but by pinning the delicate boy to his books he had only helped to defeat his own ends.

Yet there was much good in Everard, natural goodness, and if he had been allowed to establish his health by running wild at an early age it would undoubtedly all have found a way to the surface; but as it was, a great deal had failed to do so as a consequence of the unsuitable life he led for one of his strength. His nature was cramped, as are the natures of hundreds among us. He was the modern product of good intentions misapplied, and it would not perhaps have been over harsh to call him a prig. Humphrey Martin, it will be remembered, did so.

But Humphrey Martin had suggested a remedy for the flaws his keen eyes detected. A new life, new ex-

citements—a wild, open life, excitements born of chance, wind, and weather—these things, bringing with them freedom from irksome custom, and the hearty, healthy company of the salt sea waves, had seemed to open his eyes a great deal—had knocked a great deal of nonsense out of him. And besides all this, he had benefited by the constant companionship of a man of original mind and no diffidence with regard to expressing it; a man young enough to associate with him freely and yet demand, in his character of employer, a certain amount of consideration.

It had been, as his father's friend had prophesied, a chance in ten thousand for Everard when he went to sea. Part of what it had brought him he felt for himself as daily he neared the English shore. At least for his good health he gave a full mead of gratitude, and now—wouldn't he take up life afresh, and with a zest unthought of? A life of energy and enjoyment he had never believed possible before. Out of a full heart he blessed the long months behind him, and with them, the little days that brought him nearer to his old father, nearer to Pauline.

With all his faults he had some conspicuous virtues. Time and distance had never for a moment shaken his absolute trust in Pauline's faithfulness. And soon he would add the joy of sight to the joy of unsullied appreciation. He would read for himself her unchanging love in her unchanging eyes. All he had ever said to Pauline, his pretty, gentle sweetheart, in the time before he found words for his love, and in the time of love's acknowledgment; all Pauline had said to him at his own prompting,

out of her own compelling love—all came crowding back on him during those closing days of the sailing yacht's first eventful voyage.

And his young blood was stirred with longing; his young heart aflame.

Yet it was plainly his duty to go home to his old father even before visiting the girl he loved, and Everard could be trusted in such matters to do always the correct, the dutiful thing. On his way, however, he sent a telegram to Pauline requesting that an answering word might await him at Waterloo. He told her that he was hastening home, but that very shortly he would be with her, and in the warmth of his mood went to the further extravagance of assuring her that he was "dying to see her"; that he was hurrying "for all he was worth."

That train journey, the first he had taken for so long, always remained in Everard's mind as the time during which he seemed to live at greater speed than ever before or afterward.

Only a little while, such a little while, and Pauline would be in his arms, he would steep his eyes again in the sights he starved for—her beautiful eyes, her tender mouth, her hair, her sweet and sunny hair. The calmness of the past months had dropped from him; how, he wondered, had he managed such smug calmness for so long? But his thoughts refused to pursue the subject, any subject but just Pauline—Pauline!

He was very near to snatching the telegram handed to him at Waterloo and kissing it unopened before the boy's stolid gaze—Pauline had not touched it, but it came from her; it would have her message to him in it,

and how long he had waited for even a message from her!

He tore it open—and after all it was not from Pauline.

He read it through several times to make quite sure that he was rightly mastering the contents. On the fluttering sheet was written—

"It is of the gravest importance that you should come here before going home. Your father will understand and would wish it." And it was signed "Gertrude."

Not a word of Pauline! Was she ill? What was it? Surely Gertrude might have spared him a good hour of growing anxiety by some mention of Pauline. "And all to save twopence, I suppose!" he grumbled wrathfully. Well—it was a meager welcome, so far, and a wholly unexpected one. As he made the best of his way onward his mind was uneasily busy with conjecture, varied with resentment, at the stinginess, the thoughtlessness of Gertrude.

When he reached the little house in Balham his eyes sought the windows first of all, but there was no one watching for him. He had a good memory for faces, and he noticed as he went in that the small servant who opened the door was not the one who had last performed that office for him; but it seemed he was expected, for the girl's tacit reply to his request for Pauline was to show him straight into the drawing-room and to shut the door upon him without any inquiry for his name.

"I'll tell Miss Gertrude, sir," she said first, not waiting for Everard's impatient correction.

Thus, in the home of the girl he loved, Everard waited as a stranger after less than a year's absence, as he was

quick to remind himself. Yet the room was familiar enough; he could fancy it only yesterday he saw it last, or that nothing had been touched in it since he went away. In spite of Gertrude's efforts the drawing-room was the least pleasant room in the house: everything it contained had been bought at a period particularly dead to artisticness in conjunction with furniture, and her small means had never served to supplant the rosewood and velvet "suite," the large-patterned carpet and high-backed piano, into the possession of which her mother had married. And to-day there were no flowers about, no litter of books or work; a prim and disused air prevailed, for no member of the family who could avoid it ever sat there; and Everard himself had an old prejudice against the formal little room as helping to shut him out of the warmest part of a home life he was eager to share to its uttermost.

And in this uncongenial atmosphere his irritation and resentment grew with every minute he had to wait. Surely Pauline would not be a moment *now?* But the moments multiplied until his longing was almost choked in him by injured pride. One of his first impulses had been to open the door and shout for Pauline at the foot of the stairs; to try if he could not surprise her in the dear shabby "playroom"; to reassert, in some such fashion, his old position as a prospective son of the house. But after all he did the simplest thing—he stayed where he was—waiting.

It was queer treatment, he decided, but if they were going to be distant and cold they should see he could be cold also, until, at least, he was shown some reason for

a change of temperature. Like a sulky boy he elaborately arranged himself with his back to the empty fireplace, setting his sunburnt features to a look of ill-maintained hauteur, stringing himself up to return a volley of cuts for a cut received.

II

So it was that Gertrude found him when she came in. But when he saw her face white and drawn with nervousness, as he had never seen it before; when her eyes, with their own fearlessness quenched in some shadow of Pauline's wildest, most frightened look, met his; all his resolves, his pride fell from him and he was by her side in an instant.

"Ger," he exclaimed, "what's up? For God's sake where's Pauline?"

He held out his hand, but Gertrude's did not meet it; he hardly noticed that, however, in his agitation. The momentary look of appeal, of fear, had faded from the girl's eyes at the first sound of his voice, and they shone on him now cold and strangely resentful.

"Pauline is not at home," she said, and her voice, although it had a sharp, strained note in it, was quite steady.

"She's ill!" Everard broke in with. "Is she ill? Ger, old girl, don't torture me—she must be ill?"

"She's not ill—now," said Gertrude, "but she is away from home, and before you can see her I have something to tell you." She could not speak quickly enough for Everard, and he interrupted her again.

"Don't tell me she's unfaithful to me! If you tell me I've lost her, you'll about do for me."

"No," Gertrude said slowly, "it's not that." Then her cold face changed to a look of burning intensity and her hands clenched themselves at her sides in the old characteristic gesture.

"But how I wish I'd that to tell you! How I wish it!" she cried.

"Look here," he said, "you're purposely driving me mad. What's all this mystery? You've got to tell me—be quick with it."

But hers was a nature stronger, far, than his own; hers a will he could only fret against, but never quench.

"And how I've hated you!" Gertrude went remorselessly on. "Hated you with all my heart! Heaven knows how I've hated and despised you, Everard!"

As though her words were actual blows and he an arrant coward, Everard seemed to shrink speechless before them. Quite suddenly he sat down on the sofa, as if overcome with bodily faintness. For an overwhelming, terrible faintness of the spirit had indeed seized him; he covered his face with his hands, bending stricken before the sting of the girl's wild words, before the thought they forced on him.

"But—now you've come—you look such a boy!" Gertrude ended miserably. "Such a boy!"

She sank into the chair opposite him, for her strength, too, was ebbing away from her, and she needed all her strength.

Presently Everard uncovered his face—a face wan and aged; with the boyishness, after all, stamped out of it.

"Ger, dear," he said, "I know—I think I must know.

How shall I ever! But tell me for pity's sake!—in case it's not so bad as—as all that." He tried to laugh, emitting a dry, mirthless cackle. "I'm a nervous fool," he finished.

"Your nervousness comes too late," Gertrude said, stung to scornfulness again by that poor echo of a laugh. "Pauline's child—your child—is nearly nine weeks old."

He sprang to his feet. That was the horrible thought that had almost knocked him down. Now it drew him up that he might frantically denounce it.

"It's a foul lie! It can't be true!"

With a distressful color flaming in her cheeks, with something sticking in her throat and half choking her, Gertrude recognized her own first cry when she was told for the first time the story that now, it seemed, she must be always repeating as her life's task. All her own horror, at its freshest, came back to her, making her pitiless in her turn.

"You'll find it true enough," she said, and added, passionately, "Do you think I'm the sort of woman to tell you a thing like that *for fun?*"

"Are they? Are they?" Everard was saying hoarsely. He had turned his back on her and was standing against the mantelpiece, his head buried in his arms.

"They're well," Gertrude said curtly, and waited in silence. A cruel silence, alive, palpitating with the rebellion—the most respectable, most righteous rebellion—that nothing, not even pity, would ever tame in her for more than a few scattered minutes.

And while she waited, giving herself to bitter thoughts,

with a great effort Everard pulled himself together. By and by he must face this thing, stare it out until at least he grew accustomed to it, but for the present he must clearly understand why he had it to face at all.

"Couldn't I," he asked, "have been recalled in time?"

"I—I suppose not. Whether Pauline didn't believe or wouldn't believe in what she feared, I don't think she knows herself. While the fear was becoming a certainty, she still thought you were on your way back. Until you came to help her she—how naturally—shrank from any one's help, and then, when she could deceive herself no longer——"

"Then she got my last letter! Oh, what an accursed, accursed brute I've been!"

"Yes," said Gertrude quickly, "yes. And had *you* no fears?"

"I—oh, Gertrude, nothing will excuse me! I am not seeking to excuse myself."

"You'd better tell me," she said. "For Pauline's sake I'd better hear all you've got to tell me."

"I loved her, Gertrude," he said, speaking thickly and rapidly, "as—as we men do love, but, as I live, with my whole soul as well as my whole body! And—and it seemed safe enough. We were to be married directly. She seemed mine already; a week or so in time—the matter of a ceremony—bells and a blessing we called it—that was all—and it seemed very little to disregard, to anticipate, by a few days. The temptation seized on me when—when I suppose I was least prepared for it, and seemed to lift me beyond thought. I smothered thought in her."

"You couldn't have done that, Everard. She was pure until you touched her."

"Yes—until I touched her. But my kisses—my arms about her—God! Gertrude, you are a woman, and you must know how little chance she had, or I had either, swept to it by the passion she provoked in me."

"You mean—you dare to mean——?"

"I mean she drove me suddenly mad for her, without intending to, but no less certainly for that." He paused and went on again. "Look here, Gertrude, it seems somehow as if, even with all that hangs to it, I oughtn't to talk to you like this. Couldn't your father have spared you? I've deserved all—all he'd find to say."

"I promised Pauline I'd tell you myself, and before any one else; promised her when she was very ill and very distressed, dreading the blow coming to you on your return. We did not know for a few days if she was going to live, and I couldn't refuse what she'd set her heart on so. She was terrified of father and you meeting too—he is away from home now or I should have met you somewhere and seen you alone first. It has been a terrible time for father; Pauline has always been his favorite. And—and we always save him all we can; he has grown used to it. Besides, I can stand things so much better than the others can," Gertrude explained, jealous for the honor of her own. "And I must know—we must know all you've got to say before deciding."

"Deciding what?"

"Whether you can marry Pauline now."

"But you don't think there's any question about it?

You don't think I'd get out of it—allow anything to prevent it? What else is there left for either of us—if we wanted anything else? Don't tell me you think so lowly of me as to believe I'd leave her to bear it all alone any longer—now I know?"

"No—no. You'll have to marry, I suppose. It is the only thing."

"Why, I should think so!" said Everard, touched by a faint glow of self-appreciation that almost served to lift the stricken look from his young face. But Gertrude brought him back to his story.

"Go on," she said, looking away from him, "with what you were saying."

"There isn't anything more," he said. "What I've told you is all there is to tell. With such a little while to wait, selfish, senseless fool that I was, I grew sick all in an instant of waiting for her, and she felt it."

"I know that when any one Pauline loves wants anything, she is ready to barter her soul to give it to them—and then spend her life crying for her lost soul."

"It was all my fault," Everard said between his closed teeth, as though the words were even then forcing themselves out against his will.

"Yes!" flashed Gertrude. "How I have hated you, Everard Lomas!"

"I—I've deserved it—but think if it isn't hard? Then came this damned plan to send me away. At first I thought I couldn't go; then every one urged me to it, even Pauline, and I didn't believe you'd let me marry her if I stayed—unless I confessed, put shame upon her and perhaps for nothing—and so, at last, it seemed

wisest to risk it. I hoped for the best; the chances were at least even that—that nothing would happen. And I impressed it on Paulie dozens of times that she was to let me know at once if she needed me specially—I believed she understood me."

"She told me you did that. But she seems to have hoped against hope until too late."

"Her letters were so brave; there was no hint in them. I thought everything was right; believed myself a fool to have ever feared; believed myself to have been the sport of an evil conscience; and then the sea, the life, better health, countless new things, wonderful sights and experiences, served to wipe it out, as it were—and the stain of it. Gertrude," he broke off suddenly to say, "you must remember I wanted to marry her before I went, and you wouldn't have it?"

"Oh, you coward!" Gertrude said. "Yes, I remember. And what state of health were you in? Do you think we'd have let you marry her—why, you've said it yourself!—unless we'd known? You coward! You coward!"

"I suppose I can't expect much mercy from you," he said humbly.

"No. If you get the benefit of my love for Pauline it's all you can expect, all you'll get."

"Your love covers a good deal, Gertrude," he said. "I might do—much worse."

His voice had a far-off sound, and Gertrude, slowly awakening to something new in it, brushed aside the thoughts thronging round her to look at him with quick attention.

"Sit down," she commanded; "I'll fetch you some brandy. Are you all right for a minute?"

"Yes," he assured her, but sitting limply down at her bidding.

He drank the brandy she brought him, neat and at a gulp.

"Thanks," he said, "only just—in time, you know." And sat staring in front of him with unseeing gaze, his face drained of all color, his long limbs jerking uneasily.

Gertrude stood looking at him. She was holding the glass she had taken from his nerveless grasp, but presently she moved to put it down on the table, and her hands clenched at her sides. She told herself she must not be weak, must not be sentimental, or how she would despise herself afterward!

For again a vivid impression of his youthfulness had come to her, and what a wretched, hopeless tangle had youth and folly made of life for him! The loneliness before this boy, who had damned with error his way to success at the very outset, presenting itself to her for the first time, held her imagination in painful captivity. With Everard far away she had found it easy to label and portion out her feelings, and in a manner she had considered both just and final. All her pity for Pauline, all her anger for Everard, and it had seemed to her the only natural, only possible division. But with Everard before her it was not so easy to keep the two apart—either the two opposing feelings or the two people, sin-united. For Pauline had chosen to throw in her lot with Everard, and where Pauline went—not wholly willing-

ly, perhaps, yet swiftly, very swiftly—followed Gertrude's brooding love. After all she could not help what other poor guilty soul was shadowed by it, so that it covered, so that it comforted, Pauline.

Thus, in spite of her inward struggle, not yet abandoned, to avoid anything approaching sentiment in her dealings with him, her next words to Everard were spoken in the kindest tone she had used to him.

"I'm afraid you are feeling very bad," she said. "Is there nothing I can do for you?" Gertrude's *rôle* was entirely one of action; whatever the ill, she had no better balm to offer than a profession of readiness to be "doing."

Her words roused Everard; the gentle tone of them set him attempting to excuse his physical weakness. "I was in too great a hurry, too excited to wait for a meal when we landed," he said. "It's some time since I had anything. And it's been a blow," he shook himself irritably. "I'm strong enough now, but such a blow would affect any man, and—and just think how many there must be, no better than I am, who escape my punishment!"

"I can't discuss that," Gertrude said stiffly; yet it was just the view of his case that most nearly appealed to her sympathies. Some dim, unformed knowledge that it was so served to color her cheeks again hotly as she spoke, and her mood changed to one of simple annoyance with herself—that she should blush so easily.

As she stood there, silent and hot, half ashamed, half triumphant, Everard watched her dully; then, as though he was entering into some new phase of comprehension

with regard to her, as though it was of the utmost importance to him to interpret her rightly.

But he put no words to his conclusions, if he formed any. Instead, he rose to his feet with a visible effort. "Well," he said, "I ought to push on now—it must be getting late. If you'll just give me Pauline's address—tell me where I shall find her—I must be off." He spoke drearily, and in a low, toneless voice.

"I'll tell you anything that's necessary when you've had a meal, and it will be ready directly. Everard," she said, "I've got a bed ready for you—before you came—and I've wired to your father to expect you to-morrow. You can go to your room without seeing the girls—I don't think I could bear them to see you to-night, and I don't think you could bear to see your father. You've stood a good deal, and—and you don't look yourself, you know. You'll be better prepared to-morrow."

"My father!" he said. "The poor old Dad!"

"Oh," Gertrude burst out, her instinct of pity overmastered again by her militant indignation, "how could you do it? How could you disappoint him so? For his sake and the sake of all he's done for you and thought of you, how could you? Paulie—I hate to say it, and to you—but Paulie has her own wrong-doing to match yours, at least partly: she was weak where she should have been strong, and she has earned her suffering with her weakness. But your father is a saint, and how could you hurt him as you have hurt him, Everard?"

"I don't know—I don't know! The poor old Dad! Do you think he'll see me?"

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"Why, yes—he's just a saint, and he'd die for you, Everard."

"Ah!—don't! don't! I can't bear it." Then he turned to her. "Who told him?"

"I did," she said, "and of all the hard things I have had to do in these hard months that was the worst of all."

"You told him?"

"Yes," she said, ignoring the growing tone of admiration in his voice, or not recognizing it. "And I did it badly. I was ashamed of myself, and I don't know how it happened, for I am not given to tears, but I cried——"

"Cried?" he interrupted. "Gave him the chance of burying some of his own sorrow while he comforted you? Gertrude," he ended, "I know just how far I've lost your respect, and, will you believe me, I count it the worst thing I could lose! I think you must be the best woman in the world, dear—and the most beautiful. One of the pure in heart; and theirs is the birthright I have sold for myself and Pauline too."

III

It was improbable, impossible perhaps, that Everard should for long retain the exalted mood to which he had been strung by Gertrude's influence and his own better feelings when, faced suddenly with the consequences of a half-forgotten deed, remorse first claimed him. Even during the night that followed, while he tossed and turned on the bed that Gertrude's forethought had prepared for him, he began to lose his grasp of it; began slowly, surely to descend to the infinitely lower, infinitely more practical outlook by which he was subsequently to take so firm a stand. Before the morning the significance of the sin had almost lost its power to move him. Was he the first to be so tempted? So to fall? No, he decided, not by a great number. Then he couldn't be such a thoroughly bad fellow, since so evidently he was no worse than many. And that old pitiful sophistry of the wrong-doer served to strengthen him in his fight with remorse; helped him to catch at the remnant of his self-respect and fold it once more around him.

For after all, hadn't he been more tempted than some? Were there not—must there not—be many who succumbed with less excuse? Where, among the girls he knew, was one with Pauline's fatal gift of allurement? With her indescribable shy charm? He recalled her as

she looked on the evening when his love for her had so unexpectedly overflowed the rather narrow limits that had safely bounded it until then. He saw again her soft hair with the evening sunshine catching it and turning it to gold; the delicate color in her cheeks deepened with excitement, with pleasure; her eyes shining up at him full of adoration, of mystery. And once again out of the pictured past the quivering touch of her hand in his drove forth the thought of sin with a desperate, sweet longing.

He fell to telling the tale of his excuses; mumbling them half aloud. It was all very well for Gertrude to come the righteous over him—them. She had never been tempted—tried. No one untried, untempted, had the right to take up an attitude of unassailable purity like—like that. How could she tell, how could any mortal man or woman tell, what they would or would not have done, placed as he had been? Pauline—what did her family, what did any one in all the world know of Pauline but just himself? The man who loved her, to whom she had given her love. At home they treated her as a child, pretending to know all about her; the fools—when they knew nothing, nothing at all! What did they know, for instance, of her eyes with love lighting them—their beauty, their compelling, passionate strength? She was full of strange power, called forth by her love, wielded unconsciously of course, but not less powerful for that. What man, strong, worldly wise, but must have been moved by that unrealized power in her? And he had been little more than a boy, offering a boy's unguarded heart for her to play upon. Then swiftly the

shameful thought overtook him that the blame he was lifting from himself he was putting, for his own easement, on Pauline. No—he didn't mean that—never that! Only—well, it had been too hard on both of them—too hard.

And wasn't their punishment hard also? He refused to own now, thinking it over at length, that even their deserts merited such punishment. This wasn't the sort of thing that always came to light. Many—those numbers he was convinced existed, among whom he elected to shelter himself—many escaped the open punishment and disgrace he and Pauline had been called upon to face. And why, he wanted to know, had they been picked out to be made examples? What sort of judge was this to pass so severe, so irretrievable a sentence upon a first offense? It wasn't fair—wasn't fair!

Thus, in maddened resentment against fate, Everard pulled his first impulse of repentance to pieces and gave it burial.

Circling round and round in his excited brain, such thoughts as these gave him no time to fix his attention on the future—his and hers. They must be married, of course, as soon as possible, but beyond that his mind failed to reach just then. Something must be done, some plan devised to make the rest of life for them as respectable, as endurable as might be. But at present he was incapable of devising anything that his commonsense would accept; there occurred to him no feasible, practical plan.

If only the child had died. How much easier everything would have been to arrange if the child had died

at its birth. Why hadn't it? Such a little would have done it, and what a difference that little would have made. Only the people who knew already need ever have known then. The present, perhaps, would have been as hard, with the weight it cast upon them of wounded susceptibilities and wounded hearts, but at least there would have been this hope for the future: the hope of living down the scandal with the passing of time. But what could even Time, the healer, do for them encumbered with the child?—the innocent evidence of their guiltiness.

And then, again, a cleansing horror seized him at the unbridled workings of his mind. What was he doing? Murdering in thought a child? *His child.* Horrified, he turned a little, but only a little, indeed. Only back to his resentment—his wild rebellion against the black decree of fate.

Although he did not close his eyes in sleep that night Everard was late up the next morning; late as time was reckoned in the Ayres's industrious household. He had purposely delayed his arrival downstairs in the hope of finding Gertrude again alone, and his first glance round the small dining-room as he entered showed him Gertrude standing by the window and the table arranged for a solitary breakfast.

"We did not wait for you, Everard," she explained. "The girls have to be off early."

She spoke a little nervously, for the unusually early start, of Bella at any rate, had been by special favor. Bella would have to wander about for at least half an

hour before she was due at her teaching, because she was unable to refuse Gertrude anything when she wore that strained, worried look still new in her sister's experience of her.

"And I daresay it's just as well I should clear out," Bella had said. "I might be tempted to speak my mind to the fellow—and you'd be horribly shocked."

"I could not bear it, dear," Gertrude said.

"You shan't have to—I'll be off," promised Bella. But she gave Gertrude an impetuous kiss before going. "Ger, you old darling, you're wrong," she said. "If you could have hidden all this from me, Paulie's trouble and yours, you'd have hidden the thing of all others that will——"

"What, Bella?"

"Keep me to the old straight path, 'make me a good girl' if anything can."

Then Bella had gone, leaving Gertrude waiting in unaccustomed nervousness. But Everard was too relieved at their absence to consider whether the younger girls had been purposely sent out of his way or not.

He made small progress with his breakfast, only attempting to eat because Gertrude urged the necessity upon him.

"You've a great deal to do," she told him.

"My father to see, and then——"

"Yes—your father to see," she interrupted with something like relief in her tone. Had she thought he would shirk that meeting? he wondered. Put it off? Well, it didn't much matter what people, what even Gertrude, thought, he decided drearily. A little better or a little

worse, what difference did it make? "My father first," he went on doggedly, "and then Pauline."

But as to Pauline, with some persuasion, Gertrude overruled his intention of hastening to her straight from his interview with his father. Pauline was still in ignorance of his arrival in England, she reminded him, and must be prepared by letter for his coming. She was not, after going through so much, quite so strong in health yet as she used to be, and in some ways Pauline had never been particularly strong, Gertrude explained, refusing to hold herself responsible for the effect Everard's sudden and unexpected presence might work in her.

"She has grown to dread your return almost as much as she once longed for it," Gertrude said. "It—it isn't to be wondered at, and you'll have to be very gentle with her—so much depends on this first meeting, for—for both of you. It would be better to write and just say when she is to expect you, and then follow as quickly as you can on your letter. Pauline bears suspense badly, and yet I am sure that this time she ought to be prepared to see you. I daresay," Gertrude ended, her voice stiffening, "that you are thinking you understand her as well and better than I do, but you haven't lived with her as long as I have yet, Everard. I've not the confidence in myself I used to have, but in little things I do still know her better than any one else."

"Why, yes, of course," Everard conceded readily. "And it's good of you to tell me."

"And then," Gertrude went on, "before you go—Dr. Martin had a plan to propose to you, I believe. I can

hardly tell you, in case he has, after all, found it impracticable; besides, he did not authorize me to tell you, only I think you ought to see him before going to Pauline —in case he can help you——"

"How much does Martin know?" Everard asked, the old mutual dislike he and Martin had for each other creeping into his voice.

"I suppose your father told him everything, because —well, he is a great friend of your father's, isn't he? And we believed for a few days that—that Pauline would not live, and Dr. Martin went to her. I think she must have died but for his going, Everard."

"Ah!" said Everard, "she couldn't have had a more capable doctor. I suppose it's my fate," he burst out irritably, "to owe everything to that man, good and bad!"

"And you couldn't," said Gertrude, with an echoing touch of temper in her voice that Everard was too self-absorbed to notice, "you couldn't be in debt to a more capable man!"

"Very likely. But—confound him—didn't he send me on this wild-goose chase across the sea?"

"What he sent you to find you have found, haven't you?—health? And you're not going to pretend——"

"Ger, dear," he interrupted humbly enough, "you mustn't take any notice of what I say; I'm too sore to be trusted with a tongue, that's all. Give me some paper, will you? And I'll write that letter now."

But Gertrude, coming into the room almost an hour later, found the letter unwritten, and Everard leaning forward on the table, his head buried in his arms. He

lifted a half-dazed, hopeless face at the sound of the closing door. Several torn-up sheets gave evidence that he had attempted a letter, but the sheet of paper confronting him was still blank.

"Ger," he said, "I can't do it. It's beyond me."

"Well, I'll write for you; it will do as well—better, perhaps. You must look out a train that won't leave too much interval between the post and your arrival, and I'll write a few lines presently and post it so that it will reach her in the morning."

"Will you?" he exclaimed boyishly, his face lightening at once. "How awfully decent of you, Ger!"

"Yes," she said, "it may be best. At any rate it won't be so difficult to me."

"Ger," he said warmly, "what should we do without you?"

But his enthusiasm left Gertrude cold, as enthusiasm directed toward herself invariably did. "I suppose," she said very quietly and reasonably, "that if you could all do just as well without me I shouldn't be here."

IV

"Of course!" Everard was saying to himself while Humphrey Martin talked, "that's it, of course!" And why, he wondered, had he not been able to save himself from so many dragging hours that extra weight of anxiety and care by at once grasping the way out of one difficulty at least? Why had he been obliged to wait for so obvious a solution to the problem of their future lives —his and Pauline's—until it was set before him by Humphrey Martin?

"The only thing left for you to do," Martin said, with a readiness that betrayed some previous consideration of the subject and jarred on Everard's overwrought nerves, "the only thing I can suggest for you is to marry as soon as possible and persuade your—your wife to give up the care of the child. If you do that I see no reason why you should not settle down unmolested by any scandal. You were known to be engaged, and on the eve of marriage you went away. It will seem only natural for you to marry as soon as you can on your return, without waiting for any pomp or ceremony, having already postponed your wedding for a year. And then you can begin straight away on the work waiting for you—the least said is always the soonest mended. If any stories get about, you'll have to sit tight and live

them down, that's all. I don't see why you should, though. The very fact of your residence with your wife in your father's house will be your best credential. He has lived in New Town in the utmost respectability all these years, until he is practically one of the pillars of the place, and the honorable name he has made for himself is your heritage. Like most ready-made articles, it requires you to pad yourself out to fit it, but—well, you've got it to get into, and that's the great thing. If a separate establishment was feasible I shouldn't recommend it. And it isn't feasible to my mind. Your father's health is failing. I shan't help you by mincing matters, and you must see it for yourself. This business——"

"I know," said Everard bitterly, "he has aged ten years in one."

"He has a particularly high standard of morals, and he has rigorously lived up to it. You can't hoist a heavy flag without feeling the weight of it somewhere, and when the flag has to come down— Well, well, you must ease his shoulders of the work and see what rest will do. The practise had become a considerable strain to him before you went away; he's not a young man, and, needlessly but honestly, he more than ever doubts his own powers of keeping up with the times, and that alone is a torment to him. But to you, at your age, the thing should be child's play. And if you'll take my advice you'll begin by putting all the back into the work of which you're capable. There's another new man settled in the town, I hear; don't let him oust you—make a fight of it from the first. It won't do your pri-

vate reputation any harm for people to see you bustling about your professional duties, you know."

"I shan't mind work," Everard said. "Thanks to this otherwise disastrous trip, I'm well enough—as far as that goes. I shall want to be doing something."

He sat idly twirling his watch-chain, a trick of his. The first gleam of relief, of almost hope, awakened by Martin was paling, and he was fast subsiding into despondency again. No member of a small community needs to start—for ultimate success—with a cleaner record than its medical adviser, except, perhaps, its clergy, he reflected, and with truth.

"If we could sell the practise and start somewhere quite afresh it would seem easier," he said moodily.

"Yes, yes," said Humphrey Martin, and stood staring at him out of his prominent eyes without making any further answer. He occupied the hearth-rug and, since the evening was a chilly one, a fire burnt in the grate, for a fire was one of the things he never denied himself out of a barren respect to the time of the year; indeed, with a few notable exceptions, Dr. Martin wiped respect either of persons or things pretty completely out of his rule of life.

Although his practise was in the West End of London and most of his patients people of fashion, his own clothes, as Everard, who was something of a dandy, frequently remarked, would have been noticeable upon a scarecrow. Yet he was far prouder of his strange selection in garments than many a man of recognized pretensions as a fashionable model. Everything he wore he had adopted as the elaborate result of prolonged con-

sideration, and those who knew him best believed he spent the happiest moments of his life when he had some one fresh to initiate into the complexities of his underwear.

He turned now, still without speaking, to take up one of a pair of cuffs standing on the mantelpiece. He pushed up his coat-sleeve a little way, revealing no shirt beneath it—his shirt-sleeves, indeed, he always cut off well above the elbow, professing himself unable to bear the "stuffiness" they produced when worn at full length. Fear of "stuffiness," too, gave the limp look to his coats, innocent of lining. But cuffs he conceded to convention, or perhaps to vanity. For certainly he was inordinately vain of his suspenders, which he had been at the highly unnecessary trouble to patent, for joining the cuffs to his vanishing shirt-sleeves. And it was often said that his pleasure in working and displaying the ingenious clips of these suspenders, was his sole reason for always shedding his cuffs, however brief the time before him under his own roof.

As he fixed them now, an operation Everard was very familiar with yet followed with unwilling interest, he looked from the clips to his visitor and from his visitor to the clips several times before he drew down both his coat-sleeves. Everard sullenly prepared himself, out of mingled past experience and prejudice, for a dissertation on the unsanitariness of overclothing; but lovable crank that he was, Humphrey Martin was as lovably kind-hearted, and for every time he rode his hobby twice dismounted it. On this occasion, at any rate, the pleasing performance was gone through mechanically.

"Deuce take it, Everard," he said, "I wish I could advise you to get your father to sell the practise and enable you to start afresh elsewhere, as you say. New surroundings—that is the universal panacea I am forever preaching. But like everything universal—it's—it's got a leak. It leaks badly in your case. I haven't time to go into all the objections I see to such a change; unfortunately my time is nearly up, and I shall have to be moving directly. But the one I see strongest is sufficiently conclusive. The place and the very house your father is living in now he entered into with your mother—picturing it to himself as a paradise. All the romance of his life clings about that spot, and he is too old and too failing now to uproot and survive it. I shouldn't like to promise him three months' tenancy of a new house. It's just possible he has enough put by to set you up separately elsewhere, but he hasn't the strength to work that practise alone any longer, and he'd soon be reduced to living on what would seem to him your bounty. I shouldn't like to promise him more than six months of that, at most. But with you to do the bulk of the work he'll still be able to stifle that dear old conscience of his by keeping in his own hands enough to occupy him; as less and less suffices to fill his days he need never wholly realize it in that accustomed sleepy atmosphere!" Martin paused, and a slow, a whimsical smile lifted the left-hand corner of his strong mouth. "That it's no less than criminal to sacrifice a life near its beginning to a life nearly at its close is just another of the things I am preaching day in and day out. And now you see—another leakage. But your father——"

"My father is one in ten thousand," said Everard. "Haven't I hurt him enough?"

He waited a minute and then went on, muttering the words as though he spoke to himself; as though he fought to find in them the scourge for his own back to wipe out the past. "You can't have any idea what it was like to go to him—after this. Not a word of blame—not one—to lighten it. If he had cursed me I could have stood it better, but his excuses were—were hell!" His voice grew unexpectedly loud and defiant. "I tell you it was hell!" he said.

He got up, moving restlessly toward the window. Martin, with a swift look at him, but no spoken comment, took out his pocket-book and hurriedly consulted it. "I made a mistake," he said out loud, but, in his turn, as if he addressed himself. "I've still ten minutes or so." He occupied the stolen ten minutes and rather more in industriously rustling among the papers on his writing-table, scratching down hasty notes with a noisy pen, apparently absorbed in his own affairs. He did not speak again until the time was more than up; until Everard Lomas turned from his sightless gazing at the window.

"I've got to be off," he said then, "and if it's not a matter of life and death it may be that, for all I know. But I want you to remember you are always welcome here, and that I would sooner give a helping hand to your father's son, if it was in my power, than to any one else. I daresay I've been a bit hard on you sometimes, my dear fellow," he looked straight at Everard, and again with his slow, one-sided smile: "your youth was so beautifully mapped out and sharp-edged, you know.

But I don't think you'll ever find me hard on a brother sinner; I can sympathize better with a friend when I meet him on not too exalted a level, somehow. Is there anything you can think of at the moment?"

"You've been awfully good as it is," Everard said huskily. "About the child—I suppose you've no idea——"

"Yes, I've been thinking. I'm not sure I don't know the very place. You go and set the desirability of parting with it before—before that poor girl and let me know the result as soon as you can, and I'll see."

"Pauline will understand, of course," Everard said, "the absolute necessity of such a step. I shall only have to put it to her for her to see it as plainly as I do."

"Is that all? You're sure?"—Humphrey Martin, followed by Everard, was passing through the hall. "You're sure?" he said again. "Can I drive you anywhere? No? I'm sorry. Good-by, and let me know. If you're sure it is as easy as all that your part's as good as done, and I think you can rely on me for the rest—but let me know." He hurried into the carriage waiting for him, nodding to Everard on the pavement.

"Not much changed," he commented. "As cocksure as ever and nearly as blind. Well, that poor girl will be an eye-opener for him—a pretty handful—or I'm blind myself."

He produced the well-worn pocket-book, but his attention to its contents he still divided with Everard and his affairs. "Now why on earth," he questioned, "as a very pattern of a male prig—as he certainly was at the time—didn't he single out the female prig of the family

to love; why didn't he suitably set his affections on Gertrude? There would, at any rate, have been none of this pitiable business then." He turned the pages rapidly, hunting a stray note and at last he found it. But before reading it through his mouth twitched unevenly, the smile spreading to his eyes and settling there.

"But I'm not the one to grumble at him for that," he told himself. "I can't honestly say I wish he'd chosen differently."

V

In Mrs. Barber's overcrowded front parlor Pauline was waiting, her child asleep upon her lap. She sat on a cushionless wicker chair that her least movement set creaking dismally; so she sat very still, rigid almost—she did not want to wake the babe.

The one small window was closed; the window indeed was always closed for the better preservation of a stand of elderly geraniums and fuchsias that were Mrs. Barber's pride. But the door leading directly into the strip of front garden stood wide open, and the air that blew in to disturb the dust on Mrs. Barber's household gods was sweet with the scent of late summer flowers. By putting her chair where she could look out at the door Pauline might have seen along the narrow path running between the two wide beds, where dahlias and gay phlox and seeding sunflowers reared above a utilitarian undergrowth of cabbage; she might have seen to the low rickety gate and beyond the gate; she might have caught the first possible sight of Everard on his return to her.

But she had chosen to sit there waiting with only the familiar room to look at; the room grown so distressingly, so terribly familiar in the dreary months she had occupied it. Cheap photographs, cheap china and glass

ornaments, cheap prints and cheap memorial cards of dead relations—mean as to frame but lavish in black bordering and ponderous eulogy—they crowded the clumsily draped mantelpiece and the tops of the cupboards that wedged the tiny grate in place, they covered the walls, and were only cleared from the heavily footed center table because of the necessity occasioned by the lodger's meals. And at all these things Pauline had gazed and gazed until she hated the sight of them; loathed them separately and collectively as though they did her a personal injury, worked upon her a premeditated spite. The faded and patched wall paper, the horsehair couch and chairs with their dingy crochet hangings, the mats of ingeniously mangled strips of cloth put down to spare the "tread" of a threadbare carpet, together made up for her the details of a prison —and she hated them, hated the place.

What tortures she had suffered there with all those dusty, tawdry objects for her only means of distracting her mind from her own trouble! And they had never done it—not for a clear minute had they done her that small service—she owed them no gratitude. Until she came there she had never even stayed away from home alone, never remembered being quite alone for more, perhaps, than an hour at a time—and that very seldom. But here she had been quite alone, except for the few weeks she spent in the equally hateful room upstairs—the time when she believed death was coming to release her, when Mrs. Barber and Gertrude and a capable starched young nurse had shared the care of her, urging her to fight the Unknown and winning their way that

was not hers—except for just those pain-deadened weeks she had been quite alone here—and in what misery of mind!

No wonder she hated it, and yet how unbearable it had grown to her she hardly consciously realized until she sat waiting for the man whose coming would surely end her captivity—set her free. She couldn't, she decided, looking at Gertrude's letter on the table, have borne it any longer. Even with her baby to care for she could not have gone on any longer waking up to those endless days, lying down to those endless nights —and all alone.

And yet how was she to meet her deliverer, who was also the cause of all her pain? How?

The tension tightened. She could have screamed; have run and locked herself in the room upstairs; have torn hatless into the village and out to the open downs, where perchance she might lose herself until he was gone again; she might have given way to any one of a dozen maddened impulses of fear, but for the babe asleep upon her knee. She mustn't on any account disturb her baby.

She had been determined it should, if possible, be sleeping when Everard arrived. It wasn't fitting that her innocent child's unheeding ears should first be assailed by its father's voice quivering, perhaps, in sorrow, deep with repentance. That must be for her hearing only, her part in the penalty of their joint sin. The child had done no wrong—theirs was the wrong—and hers must always be the arm to shield the little life, to ward off all that threatened to obscure its brightness. And she couldn't begin her motherhood's task too soon.

So, although each minute her suspense and restlessness of mind increased, she forcibly kept her body still for the sake of the sleeping child.

How long he was in coming! Yet how could she wish him there? The wide valley of shame that only a woman can traverse, divided her now from the boyish lover who went away. She had gone down into it, down into its lost depths, and nothing could wipe out for her the memory of her sojourn there, nothing could cleanse her from its stains. Did she love him still? She did not know. The pain had been too great, and that was the truth—she no longer knew. In seeing him she would learn again, but what would the knowledge cost her? How could she endure to find that she no longer loved—that she had ceased to love in just a year—the man for whom she had given up everything?

Was it possible there was even worse before her than the endless solitary days spent in this breathless room?

At last she heard the gate creaking—slamming; heard the crunch of man's footsteps on the damp cinder-path; it had rained heavily in the night. And a man's form filled the doorway, blotting out the sunshine; a man broadened, browned, grown older, and yet to her the same. Her straining eyes took in unknowingly, in that first look, all the change and all that was not changed in him; the while he lifted his hand to the rusty knocker and dropped it again, without knocking, with a little cry that hesitated, that had a little break in it, that cut her to the heart for pity—not after all for herself, but for him.

Yet she did not move. She looked and looked, but not as though she saw. Everard came in, stopping on his way to her to shut the door. He had to kick a heavy weight aside to do it. And then Pauline's voice broke upon the awful quiet.

"Don't, don't, Everard; we shall stifle!"

After all they had passed through, after his long months of absence, that was her greeting to him, "Don't . . . we shall stifle!"

But Everard took no notice; he shut the door. He came to her, standing silent, towering in his height over her in the low-ceilinged, half-dark, crowded room. She looked up at him, her face white to the lips, a light of frenzy in her eyes.

"Open the door," she panted.

He moved toward it. Pauline crouched down over her baby, then lifted it up against her breast, no longer concerned with whether it was asleep or waking. She watched him breathlessly as he set the door open again, and slowly replaced the weight that held it back in place. He did it, not caring what he did. And after all she was out of sight of passers-by; there was no one passing.

Again he turned. The thought came to him that he had no right to force himself upon her—and yet he must. What else was there for him? for her? Ah! but he had the right! She had given it to him long ago. She was his. In spite of everything, of every one, she was his—his own. Suddenly the surging waves of his emotion broke their bounds. He flung himself down beside her, at her knees. Without another look into her face he

buried his head on her soft lap; his arms thrown round her. Her wanderer come back to her at last!

And even then Pauline made no sign. The child began to move a little in its sleep—began to waken. On the floor, close to her chair, was its cradle, an old wicker cradle on wooden rockers, lent to her by Mrs. Barber. She leant to one side and managed to lower the child into it and to cover it up. For a little while the sleepy whimpering continued and she rocked the cradle gently to and fro. Presently, peering down, she satisfied herself the child had settled to sleep again; once she let her hand rest on Everard's head, once she found his hidden eyes with it, and drew it away damp with his tears. She pressed her fingers against her own dry, burning eyes—how long ago it seemed since she had wept them dry.

"Pauline!"—Everard's voice came choked and broken up to her. He drew closer to her and still without looking up; wound his arms about her, his face now hidden on her breast. She gave a cry and her arms closed round him, held him fast; her head was bowed on his. In her voice escaped all the pent-up anguish of those silent months.

"My darling! My darling! I thought I'd left off loving you!"

VI

MANY were the things Everard found to say to Pauline, Pauline to Everard, on that day of their meeting; things too sad, too sacred, for the written word. But of the thing he had come so confidently prepared to say he put off the telling, and put it off again. It had seemed so easily said—before he came. It grew harder and harder with every hour of postponement, and yet there was no help for it—for her sake as well as his it must be said some time.

Watching Pauline bending over her baby, rocking it in her arms, talking, laughing to it; seeing—with how sharp a pang of remorse—the perfect picture they made; Pauline more beautiful, more bewitching than ever, her sweet face pressed against the tiny face of the child that was hers and his as well; realizing that here was a mother born to glory in her gift, not forced by circumstance to adopt an unwilling part; feeling all this, there came back to him Humphrey Martin's words with their meaning, hidden from him at the time of utterance, now rendered plain: *"Is that all? You're sure? If you're sure it is as easy as all that—?"* And again and again he wondered why he should then have been so certain of readily accomplishing what seemed the hardest thing in the world to him now.

As soon as the child awoke from its long sleep Pauline had lifted it out of its cradle to show to him, a tremulous pride in its possession coming a little way to the rescue of her shame.

"Look, Everard," she had said, the pain slipping from her face and voice. "Look at her; she's such a pretty baby, such a darling."

"A girl, then?" he asked, and bent wonderingly over the little bundle. Perhaps it was as well it should be a girl, he thought. He could not have told exactly why he thought so, but he fancied, hoped, it might make things easier. Mothers especially, he believed, clung closest to their boys.

"A girl," Pauline was saying. "Yes, I'm so thankful it's a girl, Everard; somehow I feel I shall be able to make a happier life for a girl than for a boy. But didn't you ask? Didn't any one tell you?"

"There was so much for me to hear—I was so worried," Everard said excusingly, painfully conscious that this question of the baby's sex, to which Pauline seemed to attach so much importance, had never once entered his head.

"Of course, I know," she said; "but they might have told you. You are glad it's a little girl, Everard? I—I was so glad. I think when she is grown up, when she has to know, a girl will understand, will be able to forgive her mother better. It won't, perhaps, be quite so hard to face a daughter's knowledge as a son's. And some one will give her a name one day—a name she will prize so dearly that she will forgive us, in her happiness, for those years for which we've given her none. A boy

would go nameless all his life, and perhaps he would never be able to forgive us that."

Her words brought a question to Everard's mind; he wanted to know how much they had treated this baby of his like other children.

"Has she been christened?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "And I was so glad when it was done, I was so anxious for her to have something of her own—God's blessing that we missed, Everard! And I didn't know what to call her, the pretty-sweet—I wanted you to tell me so. It seemed to me I had no right to call her after any one we knew; I thought, Everard—such a dreadful thought!—that they might not like it! I didn't know what to do, so I called her Pauline. She's got her mother's name, poor baby, and it seemed as if I had no right to give her any other."

"She couldn't have had a dearer name," Everard said; but he spoke absently, his mind full of the difficult thing before him that Pauline with every word was rendering more difficult, well-nigh impossible.

The room in which he found her, which she had gradually awakened out of apathy to hate, Everard hated at first sight.

"Couldn't they have found something better for you than this?" he questioned.

He had recently been forced to turn his attention more particularly to his surroundings to fill up an interval during which Mrs. Barber creaked slowly in and out with the requisites, the barest requisites, for a mid-day meal. The coarse, limp tablecloth, the cruet not too

clean, the thick plates and dishes cracked and browned with age and overheating, the absence of any dainty, tempting element in either the dinner itself or in the way it was served, disgusted him when the thought forced itself upon him that Pauline had known nothing better for months. He must get her out of this as soon as possible. What had they been thinking about?

Nor did the furtive glances, none too approving or too conciliating, cast at him by Mrs. Barber, the dusty counterpart of her furniture, render him the more prepared to accept her cottage as a suitable shelter for Pauline. He was surprised, almost shocked, at the readiness with which she presently gave up her baby to the far from prepossessing old woman.

"Shall I be having the little 'un, Miss Pauline, whiles you get your bit of dinner?" Mrs. Barber asked when she had set down, crookedly, the crowning dish of underdone steak. There was an ugly emphasis on the "Miss" in Everard's ears. He shivered impatiently. "God! was this the sort of thing he had subjected her to?"

But Pauline put the baby into the old woman's arms, smiling her charming, appreciative smile into the watery old eyes. "How good of you," she said. "Be kind to your nurse, baby, and give her a nice kiss."

"I'd sooner take a kiss of yours, Miss Pauline, than from the little 'un even, bless 'er innocent 'eart." And again Mrs. Barber sped a look, half defiant, half inquiring, at the young man standing silent and moody by her pet geraniums. Everard thrust his hands into his pockets and deliberately turned his back; it was with the

greatest difficulty that he prevented himself from exclaiming aloud his annoyance.

But Pauline readily kissed the wrinkled cheek. "Why, there you are, then!" she said. "And I think it's very nice of you to like your grown-up babies best, nursie." She understood the old woman's attitude—that it was one entirely of protection—and something of what it cost her to entertain under her humble roof the man who, to use her own past words, had spoilt the pick of her young ladies. She turned, flushed, moved with a painful gratitude, when Mrs. Barber had noisily withdrawn, to contemplate the dish of blackened, yet underdone, steak.

"Oh, Everard," she said, forcing herself to practical considerations, "I did so hope it wouldn't be steak! I can generally manage some of it, because I really have the digestion of an ostrich, and the old thing gets so upset if her meals aren't eaten; but you—you'll never manage it; it would make you horribly ill. Yes, the potatoes are quite black; they always are. What will you do?"

"Do? Do as you do," he said, sitting down to the table. "Surely what has been good enough for you all this time is good enough for me? Give me the blackest, toughest bit you can find, for goodness sake. If it choked me it would serve me jolly well right, and you know it."

"Everard, dear," she said, "you are as silly as ever, then." She put down the knife and fork she had just taken up to rest a hand on his; she smiled at him. But Everard had no answering smile. The futile sacrifice of his digestion seemed to him for the moment the only

palliative possible to his bitterly hurt self-appreciation. He insisted on a plentiful helping of the almost raw steak, that proved even harder than he had imagined it, but he ate away at it industriously, silently, until Pauline looked up from her own untouched portion, tears standing in her eyes.

"Oh, Everard! Everard!" she said wistfully, longingly, tenderly.

Then he pushed his plate away and burst out impatiently. "Couldn't they have found something better for you than this?" The only real temporary ease to his mind was to indulge his easily aroused resentment against other people. And here, in Pauline's miserable shelter, was surely a just occasion for his complaints.

It was preposterous, out of all keeping, this dirty hovel, these uneatable meals, and that unspeakable old woman for her sole companion, and for how many months! How could they? His delicately sweet Pauline! A rememberance, sickening him with its sense of contrast, came to him of the tea they had enjoyed together in the postmistress's equally crowded parlor at Hedley. That had been much such a room indeed, and yet how different! He allowed nothing for the difference in circumstance, in his mood, his point of view; he only saw in this present occasion and this present room a dreadful parody of the other occasion and the other room, and his resentment rose at the sight to fever pitch. Banishment might have been necessary, wise—was wise, he had to own it—but banishment so complete was barbarous.

He hardly listened to what Pauline was saying, or

took in her explanation. He would speak his mind to some one about this, he boasted to himself, and was then set wondering to whom he could address his wrongs. To Gertrude, after all she had done? To her father, and provoke the expression of his just anger? To his own father, already so stricken? After all, he could say nothing. He could only get her out of it as soon as might be—having first persuaded her to give up the child. *Persuade*—Humphrey Martin's word! Yes, that was it. Not just set before her the advisability for her to jump at it. Not that, but a task far harder of accomplishment.

Of all the weapons love and his manhood gave him, not one seemed quite what was needful to help him in this matter of persuading Pauline; in this necessity of his life, which required him to cut himself off from the life, even the acknowledgment, of his child.

If Pauline was to choose between them—and choose the child—what power had he over her? Oh, the hideous thought—that could not be! He sprang up. What a fool he was! How—how ridiculous!

"And you do understand now, don't you, Everard?" Pauline was questioning. She had been doing her best, in the face of Everard's obvious inattention, to explain her presence there; patiently vindicating the absent ones who had sent her to the care of the widowed, childless Mrs. Barber, her mother's old nurse, the only practical person they knew.

She had nursed all the Ayres girls into the world, and she had done more than that. She had been at the beck and call of the family in every domestic difficulty

they could remember. She had bridged the gulf from one maid-of-all-work to another; she had tidied them over the terrifying weeks of their mother's illness and death with her responsible elderly presence; she had assisted at the twins' measles and the annual spring cleaning; at every emergency, big or little, she had hastened to shut up her cottage and come to the aid of "her dear young ladies" with motherly promptitude, and how could they have done better than call upon her once again? Where would they have found a safer shelter for their secret than in that fondly prejudiced old bosom?

"And it isn't every one that would have had me—and without a word of blame—no one else we knew," Pauline faltered. Truly she had grown to hate the breathless little house, but because of what she had brought into it, and never, never, poor old Nurse Barber!

"Yes, yes," Everard said. He had gathered enough in only hearing part to make him more than ever realize the inevitableness of all the petty consequences of this fate he had nailed himself to by his own foolishness.

"Come into the garden," he said, "I want to tell you something, Paulie."

"The neighbors—Mrs. Barber—she might not like them—she has always been so considerate herself," she stammered, growing crimson.

"Well, here then. It's only this: we must be married as quickly as possible. I must be able to take you away from here, take you home, you know. I'll get a license; I'll make every arrangement and write to you—perhaps

if Mrs. Barber is so cursedly particular I'd better not come, so I'll write——"

"Everard!"

"Oh, Pauline, let me only have you, safely mine, at last and it won't seem so—so unbearable then, surely, surely? When I think of my beastly selfishness, I can't——"

"Don't, don't!" she said, and put her sheltering arms about him. "Do you know," she went on presently, "before you came this morning I felt I had reached the time when just a few more days of this would drive me mad? But now—you'll have to help me hide it—I feel so frightened. It will be like some one shut up in the dark being brought into a strong light again; and oh, I shall be frightened, Everard."

"But I shall be with you, Paulie," he said. "Darling, you will be brave and go through with it for my sake?"

"Yes," she promised. "And I believe I could bear anything really that was best for you—and little Pauline."

She added the child's name softly, almost under her breath, more to herself than to Everard; she did not even know if he heard.

But Everard caught the whispered conclusion. Was this the time, he asked himself savagely, to say the rest of what he had to say? For the moment he caught at what relief he could abstract from the return of Mrs. Barber and her charge. He sat watching her ponderous movements as she cleared the cloth, twirling the loose end of his watch-chain, knitting his brows, and giving

the old woman all the occasion in his power for her subsequent remark.

"A nasty temper, if I know one! And she an angel in spite of everything, and if I 'ave to burn for saying it!"

VII

And after all it was Pauline who forced his hand, who introduced the subject he had found so evasive, so difficult of approach, who cut him off at last from all further dallying.

"Oh, I am so thankful you are here!" she said. "I never realized quite how thankful I should be." Her eyes seemed to grow larger and darker, the pupils unnaturally dilated; the wild look he remembered well creeping into them, growing stronger in them, settling there as she spoke.

"I have had such a dreadful fear lately. Now you've come it will be all right! You will help me, but I was so afraid something would be said and I alone to meet it. No one has said anything really, only I have felt it in the air—it has made its way down to my solitude and has filled the air even here. You'll think I'm silly, Everard, so troubled over what is only a suspicion, after all; you do not know how real my suspicions are to me—how often they are true."

"Go on, dear," he said. He, too, was the victim of a suspicion. He had been standing looking at her; now he hastily turned his face away.

"I have felt," she faltered, "that they wanted me to —Everard, I can hardly say it! Give up the baby—

give up our child to strangers. To deny our child! To hide her out of sight and go free ourselves."

He did not move, did not turn his head; he was looking into the geraniums as though their knotted stems and uneven leafage absorbed him, fascinated him. But as he interrupted her he broke off a leaf, then a flower, and began to fit them absently into his buttonhole.

"Pauline," he said, "don't you really think, dear, that it——"

"What, Everard, what?"

"Would be the right thing to do?" he finished, and carefully broke a little projecting piece off the stalk of the scarlet flower.

"What would be right, Everard?" Her voice seemed quite still; he could not see her eyes.

"To—to do just that, dear—in a way?"

"Hide the child?"

"Well, yes, that practically, I suppose. We should see that she is taken every care of, that she is properly looked after and brought up and—and all that. Martin seems to think he knows of some one—he hasn't given me any particulars yet, but we can trust Martin, you know—aren't we always trusting him?" His voice rose on the irrelevant question, but no answer came and he went on. In the pause he had felt along the edge of his waistcoat for a pin and found one; as he spoke he was employed in pinning the scarlet flower in place, occupied in arranging it precisely, deliberately against the dark blue background his coat made for it.

"It isn't as if the child would lose even as much as she would gain," he went on, picking his arguments

carefully from the sources he believed most likely to touch her. "She would be taken every care of—she is too young now to know you, to miss you, and in this way she will be for ever spared the knowledge of—of her birth. We shall at least be insuring her ignorance of that, and it seems to me it is our positive duty to make so much sure for her."

"Ah!"

It came to him while he waited for something to follow on that short, sharp cry, waited in vain, that he would be acting clumsily in presupposing her rejection of the plan he had made for them, even in spite of the words in which she had introduced the subject.

"And of course you'll see, in thinking of it, dear, how it is the only possible way for us. You will be my wife, and at any cost I must protect my wife's name and my own, as far as now lies in my power, for my wife's sake. It is necessary for numbers of reasons, but it is even necessary on the score of our bread and cheese. I have my work to do, and it is only in that way I shall be allowed to do it. You haven't thought that everybody in New Town knows me or knows something of me and —and that hardly a soul of them all would feel called upon to employ me if they knew the truth."

"New Town is not the only place," she said in a hard, dry voice he barely recognized. Something showed him that in those words was the beginning of a concession. Nothing showed him that it was not only the beginning but also the end of the way she was prepared to go. He spoke gently, already a touch of indulgence, as to a child won over in his voice.

"It is the only place for me," he said. "I wish to goodness it wasn't so, but it is." He went over those that seemed to him suitable of the arguments Humphrey Martin had put forward; his father's long residence in the town, his broken health and spirit. He showed her very plainly where he conceived his duty to his father lay, shamefaced—that face still turned—he went as far as to admit that there was just one thing he felt he had no right to do even for her sake, certainly not for his own, to bring this trouble, this wrong-doing of theirs, openly to blot out his father's spotless reputation. He added as they arose in his mind conclusive reasons from every side in favor of this, to him, the only proper course; they followed one another, a steady stream, and he was almost surprised himself at their number, their force. "Such things must be, Pauline," he said at length. "How would the world be bearable, otherwise? Avoid the appearance of evil—who says that?"

"No one, Everard, in that sense. And for such as I the world is not bearable as it is."

"But there is no help for it," he said. "It is all part of the punishment that I have brought on you." Sorrow for her, for them both, made his voice unsteady. At last he turned and faced her.

"It isn't that," she said, "it is rather an evasion of punishment. And I earned my own punishment, do you hear, Everard? I dare not evade it even for your sake, and I dare not sacrifice the child to you—oh, I dare not!"

She stood before him, her hands clasped together; she was wearing a little light cotton dress a child might

have worn, and he thought he had never seen her looking younger, more appealingly helpless in her youth than she looked now. Her face was very white, but it looked a child's face still, only her eyes seemed older, far older than the rest of her; the fancy came to him that the light in her dark eyes was the turbulent passionate light of autumn, burning, by accident, in a face of spring.

He tried to brace his own boyish features to sternness, to assume an authoritative tone that should very properly overawe this unreasonable child.

"Paulie," he said, "this is a matter you must be content to leave in my hands and in the hands of those better able to judge of what is fitting than it is possible you can be. My dear, my poor little dear! what can a girl like you know of such things? You must be guided, you must be led, by those qualified to guide and lead you. Do you think I would put you to the pain of this parting if it wasn't an absolute necessity? You can not think of me so hardly as that, Paulie. It must be—there is no other way. Child! after all I've made you suffer do you think I would ask you to suffer another pang willingly? But it is to save you pain, not to inflict it, that I ask this, demand this of you. Just in this one thing you must let me know what is best for you and for us all."

But Pauline was gazing at the gay flower with which, absently, unthinkingly, he had filled his buttonhole, and he could not tell whether she heard what he was saying or not.

"Everard," she asked, " have you read Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*? I found it in one of those cupboards—

some lodger of Mrs. Barber's must have left it—wasn't it an appropriate book for me to find and read here? I finished it the night before baby was born—wasn't that an appropriate night for me to finish it? Do you know what you ought to do? You ought to pin that flower on me; you oughtn't to be wearing it yourself. It is the woman's part, and not the man's, to wear the scarlet badge in public."

"Pauline," he cried angrily, "no one does such things nowadays." His voice shook with indignation, the hot color mounted painfully on his fair youthful face to the roots of his fair smooth hair. He pulled the flower out of his coat, set his heel upon it, ground the life and gaiety out of it with his remorseless heel, but he could not kill the sting in Pauline's words, could not evade her eyes fixed upon his face. "I will not have my wife speak like that," he said roughly, moved beyond his consideration, his gentleness. "Do you hear?"

"But I am not your wife," Pauline said. "I am only the mother of your child. And I will never be your wife, never, to leave your child to strangers, to deny it."

"But you must—for the child's sake you must!"

"No, not for the child's sake. Don't you think it would come out? Doesn't everything in time? Don't you think she would grow up to know, first that there was a mystery about her birth, and then what that mystery was, even if she never found us, never tracked us to fasten our guilt upon us? With this added to the weight of it—that we denied her our love, our care, a place in our home and our hearts, the only things we

have left it in our power to give her! That we bought our freedom with the love that should be hers—you and I——"

Suddenly her face changed and she came close to him, put her hand upon his arm, looking up into his eyes, seeming to search there for something she had lost. She began to plead with him, rapidly, earnestly.

"You and I, Everard, together we could give her a happy little life, couldn't we?—taught by our love for each other, helped by that. Dearest, we would so wind ourselves about her heart, that when she had to know it would only be to—to sorrow for us and forgive. She would have learnt from day to day what it cost us so to hurt her; looking back upon her happy years she would not want to hurt us, in our turn, by withholding her forgiveness. Everard, do you think God would withhold his forgiveness if we won our child's? I do not think so—I can not think so! She will bring it to us—if we let her, she will bring us that. Don't you think, perhaps, it was for that she came to us? And we must have God's forgiveness—that is the only thing that really, really matters—that will still matter in the end. Oh, we can not spoil our whole lives for one fault! We must bear our punishment and start afresh——"

"Darling," he interrupted—moved, even a little shaken, but only a little—"your theories are all very beautiful, and in a land of angels they might be practicable too. Angels have fallen and angels might, perhaps, climb again in your way. But this is a hard, cold world where men and women have to manage as best they can, and it has been settled ages ago, by those who knew

the needs of our world better than we can be expected to know them, that certain things must be covered over as decently and completely as possible; and this story of ours is such a thing. It isn't enough that we should be concerned with just our personal salvation; we have the good of society at large to consider as well. And—and Paulie, dear," he ended, "every one you ask will tell you what I tell you."

"Yes," she said, "I believe that. I seem to feel that is true," and she dropped her hold of him.

"It is all true, the truth you must accept, must abide by."

"Oh, but I can not!" Then again she touched his arm, appealing to him. "Is this true?—is it? That if I marry you I must give up the child?"

"You must choose between us," he said, seeking to frighten her. Then becoming frightened himself as he looked into her face at what he had done, he tried to hold her, entreating her.

"Pauline, choose me! Choose me!"

She tore herself away from him, caught up the child out of its cradle and strained it to her breast. Above its whimpering her voice rose steadily.

"I belong to the child," she said. "You robbed me of all choice when you reversed the old order, when you made me the mother of your child before you made me your wife. I belong to the child: she is your child too, but I can not leave her even for you."

Through those same arguments he went, and on them he piled others and yet others, and all the while she sat crouching, over her baby, never answering, never

speaking, with her white child's face and her tragedy-haunted eyes, and her determination like a visible living thing surrounding her, cutting her completely off from him.

And so in the end he left her.

VIII

But with the morning he was there again, commanding, persuading, entreating, and all to no avail; so that once more he was forced to go baffled, thwarted, helpless.

"You can not love me," he said at one time, "and I thought you loved me, Pauline. I would have staked my soul upon the faithfulness of your love; but you can not care for me, after all."

"God knows I love you, Everard," she answered, "enough to suffer for you and to suffer alone. How could a woman show you greater love than that?"

"But it isn't that sort of love I want," he said desperately. "I'm not good enough for it. You see, dear, I am quite an ordinary sort of fellow, and it's you—you I want."

But to that she made no answer. She only looked at him, only slowly shook her head.

She had always seemed to him so tractable, so easily persuaded. He had always been blinded to her real nature by fancied attributes he had himself woven about his idea of her, chiefly, and not unnaturally, misled by a surface likeness to her lighter-hearted sisters. She had always given in to him for the pleasure it was to her to please him, and he had never realized that a time might come when she would be driven to set above her own joy in giving him all he wanted her care for his soul

and her own—driven to it by the impulse of a moment yielded to, by one false step no sooner over than regretted.

For himself, he had taken love lightly, as, in reality, he took the whole of life. He wasn't prepared to make of that false step the reason for an ideally perfect future existence. It did not seem to him consistent to expect it, and if he prided himself on one thing more than another it was on his consistency. After all, who was Pauline to set herself against the opinion of the world? And so he threw the first stone at her—he, the partner of her guilt. For that is the recognized privilege of the man bound in such a partnership, and Everard was too frailly human not to avail himself of it.

"Then you're determined to stick to this—this utterly preposterous idea of yours?" He stammered wrathfully. "You are actually to set up for an injured saint in this damned uncomfortable way?"

"Oh, Everard, go!" she wailed. "I can not bear it."

"Oh, I'm going fast enough," he said, and took his cap off the table as he spoke. But at the door he paused.

"Pauline, forgive me!" he begged. "You drive me beside myself. I—you make it too hard for me. No one will believe I've tried to turn you, as goodness knows I have tried. Don't you see they'll simply blame me for leaving you to your folly? Think I wanted to get out of marrying you—was cad enough and low enough for that—and allowed you to sacrifice yourself to me. Can't you see what it will be?"

"But it won't be like that," she said wearily. "And what does it matter if it isn't true?"

"If only I hadn't gone away!" he cried.

"Would that—could that have made so great a difference to us?" she said. "I have thought of it—how often I have thought and thought of that, Everard! And oh, I don't see how we could have been happy then! There would have been just the same wrong-doing—hidden to others—but we should have known all the time."

"Well *I* could have borne it better that way," and there was an emphasis and a little sneering laugh in his voice that were not good to hear.

"But it would have *been* no better," said Pauline.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "I'm off. It's pretty plain I'm doing no good. But you'll be sorry for this one day—you mark my words."

His heart was full of anger; slowly, painfully it seemed displacing, squeezing out the love in it. Yet in the going—if it really was going—how it hurt him! All his youth was risen in rebellion against the pain life put upon him—life with its hard cold hand, and love's that was harder. He rammed on his cap and went out of the dark little room into the gay sunlit garden, with no word more of good-by.

Pauline flew down the pathway after him.

"I shall never be more sorry than I am now," she said breathlessly. "For, oh, Everard, I do love you."

He caught hold of her, regardless of Mrs. Barber's feelings, of the neighbors, of everything beyond himself and Pauline and their trouble that seemed so overwhelming. He looked down into her eyes and tried his hardest to misread what he saw there.

"For the last time—you will give in?"

"No—no, I can not."

He seemed about to let go his strong grasp of her, but instead he bent and kissed her upon her lips.

"To think," he cried as he raised his head, "that such a little weak thing should have so much power to misuse!" Then he released her so suddenly that she almost fell. There had been as much anger as love in that kiss, and she knew it.

He started off again. "You are breaking my heart," he called cruelly back at her. And this time she let him go; she did not try to stop him.

When he was out of sight she went in, walking very slowly, very weakly. Her baby was asleep, but she took it into her arms and sat down with it in the creaking wicker chair where Everard first found her.

"Do hearts break, Baby?" she asked. "I don't believe they are ever so merciful; I believe they only go on aching—always aching. Little Pauline, how is your mother going to build your happy life out of this beginning?"

Others came to her on the same errand as Everard's, but no one prepared, as he had been, to be successful. Her father and Gertrude came together, came to find her immovable, set on her own way, secure in her conviction that hers was the only right way, passed, in this little while, far beyond the influences that used to sway her so unfailingly.

It was a proof that Gertrude had lost faith in her own power, was forewarned to failure, that she should have waited for her father's support, that she had not con-

fidently undertaken to overrule her sister unaided, had not immediately made herself responsible for the desired change in Pauline's outlook, or at the least in Pauline's actions.

"Ger, you'll try your best?" Everard had begged of her. "Ger, dear, you must manage it somehow." But she had held out no hopes to him; she had none herself. And, very likely unreasonably, yet undeniably, she added it to her long list against him that he had forced her to own this. There was a speech of Pauline's that she added also with an unfairness that was characteristic of her dealings with those two only.

"Do you think I will change my mind for you, if I wouldn't for Everard?" Pauline asked. Even her father remembered that as the first unkind word they had from her, but being a man he did not charge it to Everard Lomas's account.

"She ought to have had a mother to look after her," he told himself, forgetful of the manner of woman his wife had been. Gertrude had worked for him so well and so long that she had achieved this: she had wiped out the memory of her mother's incompetence from her father's mind. He saw himself, in looking back, always supported by a woman's carefulness, only in this instance, as he believed, it had not been the right woman. He lingered a few minutes after Gertrude had started.

"I blame myself, Pauline," he said. "I ought to have married again for the sake of my girls. Then you would at least have had some one——"

"Daddie," Pauline cried, "do not *you* know that just

I myself am answerable for all I've done—all I shall do?"

"Gertrude, she's a tyrant our Gertrude, would never allow me to take up that view," he said, smiling a little in spite of himself, in spite of his very genuine distress.

"Oh, father, darling, do you believe I would give anything to think as you all do?"

He looked at her with eyes very like her own. "Yes," he said. "I don't fancy a solitary view is ever a comfortable one to hold. I have never had this particular problem to face for myself," he went on. "And I only know what I should have done because I know myself for a coward."

Then he kissed her hurriedly and followed Gertrude.

IX

Even Humphrey Martin made his protest on the side of expediency, of custom, and it was so well known that he set such scanty store by either of these things that his advocacy of them now might have been expected to carry conviction. When he voluntarily gave up some of his valuable time to run down to Mrs. Barber's cottage and visit Pauline there, it was with his suspicions unconfirmed. But they had been very strong suspicions and, added to the promptings of his helpful disposition, were sufficient to excuse his visit to himself.

To Pauline he said: "I'm sure you must have credited that precious baby with every ill under the sun by this time, so I've just come to give you my opinion on her—for what it's worth."

"Baby is quite well," Pauline said, smiling bravely. "But how kind of you to come!" and while she spoke his trained eyes read in her face that he, at any rate, had not been mistaken in her.

What he talked of himself as "chronic timelessness" had taught him many short cuts into the confidence of those he wished to serve. Almost as soon as he had proclaimed a clean bill of health for the little Pauline he was sufficiently in possession of this last development of the elder Pauline's story to be able to add his advice to the persuasions already heaped upon her.

Most of the arguments he produced for her consideration were original enough to appeal to her forcibly—they might even have won her over, but for that seared conscience that weighed so heavily on the other side where she conceived lay her duty to her child. He had, what no one else had brought her, a definite plan to unfold for the child's future; he had a promise to give her of a home for it where it would lack nothing that under the circumstances could be supplied; where it would be easy for him to keep an eye on the child himself, befriending it in every way within his power.

"You could trust me for that," he said.

"Yes, I know I could," said Pauline.

But he went away with his self-appointed mission unfulfilled, and failure to carry out a project was not an experience that often came in Humphrey Martin's way.

"A pretty handful!" he told himself again, as he sat idle in the train that was taking him back to town. "A clear case of moral hysteria, and yet if it wasn't for old Lomas I'm dashed if I'd have said a word against her martyring herself in her own way. But there is always an equivalent to old Lomas—he stands for the world's whitewash, bless his heart! He and Gertrude—one must not forget Gertrude. I don't forget you, Gertrude"—he smiled slowly, the one-sided smile that so changed his whole face. "If you didn't quite get over me with your heroics, my pretty Pauline, it's because you've got a sister who doesn't need them—thank God!"

And in the end it was old Doctor Lomas, that bowed saint, who gave his wife to Everard and on the con-

ditions Everard firmly believed he had been forced to make. He went to her without telling any one of his intention; he came from her and told no one of how he gained his victory or what it cost. Nor did he tell—even to Everard—that the pitiful victory was won, the news of that came to him in a letter from Pauline herself.

"I have promised your father," she wrote, "to give up our child, as you all think best, and to marry you, Everard. How I hope you are all right and that I have been wrong! For I could bear so much better to be wrong, than right only to be false to what is right."

That was all. Yet it meant so much to Everard that for the time, at any rate, it served to satisfy him.

He went to his father. "Dad, how can I thank you?" he said huskily. "I have heard from Pauline. You know what she had to say?"

Doctor Lomas looked at Everard, doubt and trouble struggling in his worn face with the affection that always marked it whenever he regarded his son.

"My boy," he said, "I trust I have done what is best, but I can not be sure, even now."

"Why there absolutely can't be two opinions!" Everard exclaimed.

"There is that poor girl's opinion, for which she has the courage and we have not. She has given in, but I do not see that proves she does not hold the same opinion, only that she has allowed it to be overruled."

"Pauline?" Everard almost laughed. "She's only a girl, Dad, and she didn't in the least understand what lay before her if she had persisted. She'll be thankful enough she allowed herself to be guided, one day. How

could she possibly judge? What knowledge of life has she? She'll thank you for this to the end of her days, of course she will. Poor darling, it will be an awful wrench at first, but—but we'll teach her to forget it," his boyish pride urged him to a show of confidence he hardly felt. "She's awfully fond of me—she really is—I shall be able to make it up to her in—in time, you know. It's like you to worry, but you mustn't: we shall both be unceasingly grateful to you." He began to move about the room in his restless fashion, aimlessly taking things up and putting them down again, one of his many tricks. "I can't think how in the world you managed it though," he wondered aloud.

But his father did not enlighten him. He was speaking, but he seemed to be addressing himself, muttering the words half below his breath.

"A sacrifice—her child or mine? Can that be true? *On the side of the angels*—was she fighting on the side of the angels, and have I pinned her to earth to make her my son's wife?"

Everard did not heed, did not hear. A thought had come to disturb his short-lived satisfaction, the thought that another had succeeded where he had failed. What Pauline had denied to him she had given to some one else, and, although he was to receive the benefit, that knowledge stung him, wounded him. Jealousy made him almost ungrateful, certainly deafened him.

Thus it was that one misty autumn morning Pauline got up early to bathe and dress her baby for the last time. To kiss despairingly its little naked limbs; to

cover them for ever from her sight with tiny garments of her own and Gertrude's making; to wonder jealously with every button she fastened, every tape she tied, who would render all this service next for the child it was her one craving to serve continually.

Little Pauline, in spite of her sad start in life, was a healthy, unusually happy baby. She laughed and crowed into her mother's face, and if anything could now have banished the sorrow in her mother's eyes she alone had the power to do it. Even on that sad morning the charm she wielded so unconsciously did its work. Pauline the elder laughed back at her; gave her smiles wrung dry from a breaking heart.

When her baby was asleep in the wicker cradle Pauline opened the door into the kitchen where Mrs. Barber and Gertrude now waited. The good old woman's eyes were red-rimmed with sympathetic tears; she mopped them continually with a dingy black-bordered handkerchief, which she stowed away with difficulty into a capacious pocket one minute, and rescued again, with equal difficulty, the next. She was undisguisedly distressed, and in a direction that surprised herself.

"Seems less like a wedding than a funeral, I do say," she had just confided to Gertrude. "I've said all along as 'twas the right thing, and I says so still 'cos it ain't my 'abit to go back on my words, come what will. But it do seem most cruel 'ard like—it's making me all topsy turvy over in my rights and wrongs, Miss Gertrude, and I'm thinking I shan't know my right 'and from my left 'and next."

She stared down at those wrinkled members distress-

fully, but Gertrude said nothing. Her "rights and wrongs" were not exchangeable, yet all her loving heart was with her sister in this parting.

And then Pauline, her hat and coat on, and looking as though she meant only to go out for an early walk, opened the door that had shut her in alone with her darling for the last moments too precious to share.

"I'm ready," she said, no break in her clear voice, no tears in her eyes; "we must go, Ger. Baby is fast asleep, Mrs. Barber, and I think she will very likely sleep until Doctor Martin comes for her with the lady. I have put the bottle ready for when she wakes, there will only be to warm it. I think I have done everything; her cloak and bonnet are on the sofa, her shawl is round her now. You'll tuck her darling toes up warmly, nursie?" She put her arms round Mrs. Barber's neck and suffered for a moment her ample and watery embrace. "You've been so good to us, nursie—to baby and to me—so good to us both."

Then she pushed the old woman gently from her and followed Gertrude out of the cottage; without a backward look passed down the cinder path between the wide beds, where, frost-bitten, the last of the dahlias drooped dejected and the sturdy cabbages glistened silver in the sun; passed down the village street and into the musty damp building where Everard waited for her—Everard and the Church's blessing that once they had set aside.

Everard Lomas took his wife away for only a few days before bringing her to his father's home. His work there had been waiting for a long time, and work

indeed promised him a solace he looked for in vain elsewhere. This belated honeymoon, following a belated marriage, held small attractions for either of their youthful, heavily laden souls. It had taken all their courage to go through with it; they did it not for the sake of each other's undivided company, but for the sake of appearance, that all too late they had decided to make their future's guide. With their spoilt beginning, their nervous shrinking from a life untried, filled with apprehension and dismay where expectation should have been lifting them heaven high, they made a spectacle of pity to move the sternest heart, and between them, a dividing line that even their deepest sympathy for each other could not pass, was ever the shadow of the child.

In the days that followed her marriage Pauline was hardly known to mention her baby even to its father; perhaps least of all to its father, although that was a possibility Everard never realized. Only sometimes in the night he would wake up to fancy he heard her crying, guessing, and guessing truly, a reason for those tears. But he dared not make sure; he hid his suspicions, for the most part, as carefully as she hid her grief.

Once he came home late from a patient to find her sitting up in bed wringing her hands—the old wild, pathetic look in the eyes she turned to him.

"What is it, dear?" he asked. "What is it, Paulie?"

"My baby crying—and they do not go to her," she said. "Can't you hear, Everard? Can't you?" She threw herself back on the pillows. "Oh, no, you can not! And isn't it strange that you should never hear what I hear always?"

BOOK III

BEYOND

"When God on that sin had pity and did not meet it as such,
But tempered the wind to thy uses, and softened the world to thy touch,
At least thou wast moved in thy soul, though unable to prove it afar,
Thou couldst carry thy light like a jewel, not giving it out like a star?
'I have sinned,' she said
'And not merited
The gift He gives, by the grace He sees!
The mine-cave praiseth the jewel, the hillside praiseth the star;
I am viler than these.'"

E. B. BROWNING.

"When the dews of a spring-season dawning,
Shine sweet o'er the glistening earth,
It wakens that bitter self-scorning,
That woe at our own unworth.

"Though vision content with its blessing,
To exquisite beauty be bond;
The restless soul still must be guessing
At meaning and message—beyond.

"O Life, there's delight in thy living,
Still we strive from the good to the best,
And maybe, Death alone has in giving
Release from the Great Unrest."

P. H. LULHAM.

BOOK III

I

"I'LL thank you, Gertrude," Humphrey Martin said, "to give me your opinion on this as a waistcoat?"

"I *won't* be called Gertrude!" Gertrude smiled.

"Well, then, Ger! Ger suits me better, I think."

"And certainly not Ger. I will not have it."

"Gertrude, it's ridiculous. I shall call you what I like. Why, how long have I known you? Isn't it nearly three years? If I can't call you by your Christian name now, when shall I be allowed to?"

"But I never," she objected, "call you—" She paused and laughed provokingly on the very verge of the word she denied herself and him. "Well, candidly, as a waistcoat I don't think much of it," she ended.

"And pray, why not? Doesn't it fit?"

"Pretty well—for you. Yet it has a home-made air. Those red spots look as if some one had added them as an afterthought, with worsted and a darning-needle. Are you sure that some one didn't?"

"No," he smiled. "No, I am not sure, Miss Sharp-Eyes. In fact, some one did. But I protest against the worsted—they are silk, genuine silk, and a beastly nui-

sance to thread, though I licked it like the dickens—quite expect I've poisoned myself—goodness knows what they put in these dyes. Never saw such a muddle; wouldn't stick together anyhow, but went twirling up a stalk every time, leaving only a miserable strand to go through the eye, and that wouldn't go. I wanted you there to thread the needle, Gertrude, I can tell you."

"But I shouldn't have threaded it for any such nonsense," Gertrude declared.

"I consider them a great improvement," he maintained stoutly.

"How can you be so silly—you?"

"And why shouldn't I be silly as well as another?"

"Because you can be sensible when you choose."

"Can't every one?"

"No, not—well not as sensible as you!" But to her remark she added a laugh, the merry, fearless laugh which was the thing he loved most perhaps about her.

"It's dull work being sensible always, Ger," he complained. But Gertrude only looked and would not answer him.

"It's dull work being sensible alone, Ger," he said.

"No duller than being silly alone, surely?" And his slow one-sided smile came out to meet her quick laughter.

"That reminds me," he said. "It must be a month or more since I asked you last. When are you going to marry me, Miss Ayres?"

"I'm not going to marry at all—you or any one."

"I'm not concerned with any one—except myself. But you might marry me, Ger."

"I can't marry you," she said. "Why won't you believe it? You know I can't be spared—for one thing."

"Now, how old were you when you undertook the management of this establishment?"

"Fifteen—but——"

"And Bella? How old is Bella?"

"Bella's a child——"

"No, that she isn't. And she's twenty at least."

"She's twenty-one; you know, because you gave her the bracelet."

"I know, because I haven't yet paid for the bracelet. And do you mean to say Bella can not do at twenty-one what you did at fifteen? Don't you think that is being a little hard, a little slighting, to our Bella? And isn't everything in apple-pie order, and doesn't every one less to keep make the money go round the more merrily? And don't you know—my dear! my dear! that there's nobody absolutely indispensable in all the world except"—he lingered to smile at her—"except you to me, Gertrude?"

"Oh, I can not," she said. "You oughtn't to worry."

"Well, I've not worried now for a whole month—you oughtn't to complain, I think. Just give me a reason. I don't believe you've got a single real reason about you. If you are to be believed, you do not consider me too old, or too fat——"

"Why, I've never said so!"

"Oh, you would have said so if you'd thought it—I know you! And you're not in love with anybody else?"

"I am not in love with anybody at all," said Gertrude,

in case there should be occasion for mistake. But to that Humphrey Martin made no answer, unless an upward twitching of the left-hand corner of his mouth could be considered an answer. Instead, he began to plead.

"Now give me what you *call* a reason," said he.

"I don't want to be married," she said. "I am afraid."

"You afraid!"

"Oh, yes—I am afraid. It is the one thing of which I have always been afraid. One sees so many failures; to go no farther, look at Pauline and Everard. I believe they love each other, and yet, think if they are happy!"

"But, my dear, the—" He paused.

"Yes, I know—" And she paused too. In the silence that ensued Gertrude blushed and Humphrey Martin turned his keen eyes away. Although that girlish habit of hers, that it seemed as if she could not outgrow, was infinitely dear to him, he did not consider he had yet won the right to regard her blushing.

"Your sister Pauline," he said presently, "is very different from you."

"She's much nicer than I am, and easier to get on with."

"Is she? Well, well, that's my risk."

"I can't do it. It's no good."

"I shall take to drink, Gertrude."

"I can't help that either."

"I shall poison some one."

"That will certainly be at your own risk," she smiled.

"I'll pay you out for this delay when you do give in," he promised her.

"But I don't intend giving in ever."

"Well, I'll let you off for another month—if I can, only don't laugh too often. It's hardest when you laugh, somehow, and it's all precious hard, I can tell you."

"Haven't you any pride?" Gertrude asked.

"Not a scrap," he said proudly.

"Didn't you come provided with a pretext this time?" she questioned. "You are generally so particular about the pretext. Or was it the waistcoat?"

"The waistcoat, of course, and I don't believe a word you say about it; I believe you admire it tremendously. But there was something besides."

"Tell me about it, then." She settled herself more comfortably in her chair and her face cleared, for in spite of her carefully preserved lightness of tone and her laughter there had been some hint of shadow on Gertrude's face that so clearly mirrored her thoughts—to this man, at least.

"Your father's right," he told himself, looking down at her from his customary stand on the hearthrug. "You are a tyrant, Ger. And you shall have proper exercise for your powers one day; I'll see to that." His thoughts flew swiftly in the direction they so often traveled, and he saw himself the delighted chief victim of Gertrude's tyranny when he should have come out the victor in the fight preceding her reign. Even as a boy he had never known what it was to be domineered over by a woman, and strangely enough it was the thing

he always looked forward to with whimsical longing. He glanced now at his cuffs, immediately to picture himself sitting down to dinner in them in his own house as a concession—suitably emphasized—to Gertrude's supremacy. How uncomfortable he would be! How deliciously uncomfortable when you considered the reward he would extort—trust him for that—for every such evidence of reformed behavior. "Henpecked!" He chuckled to himself. "Bless her heart!" And she should peck, if it pleased her one half as well as it would please him.

"*Now* what are you laughing at?" asked Gertrude.

"Laughing? I wasn't laughing," he said brazenly. "Well, well—this pretext!" He drew himself up, straightening his wide shoulders; brushing resolutely aside his own thoughts that he might the better reach to thoughts of others, as was his habit.

"I'm afraid you won't care for the pretext much, this time. I wish there was no need to bring it to you."

And it was true that Gertrude did not care for it; how could she, when it concerned the uncertain health into which Pauline seemed drifting of late, the trouble that surrounded her?

For a long time past old Doctor Lomas had been failing. He had never really lost his sense of bitter disappointment in his son; never been the same man since the time of Everard's going to sea, his shadowed return, his spoilt marriage. And now, for some months, he had been confined to his room by an illness from which neither Everard nor Humphrey Martin expected him to recover. And through it all Pauline had worked won-

ders; had thrown herself into the nursing and care of the old man in a way which, for him, had worked wonders, indeed, but had told considerably on her own strength.

And for the old doctor's sake, as well as her own, it was all important that she should not break down. So Humphrey Martin pointed out, staring with prominent eyes over Gertrude's head—eyes full of distress, for Dr. Lomas held the old place, still, in his strongly affectionate heart.

"The nurse is all very well," he said. "And I am glad I persuaded them to have her—she's a good sort and clever. But your sister must have a finger in every pie or nothing's quite right for the dear old chap. We don't make model patients, we doctors, even the very best of us, you know. And he can't do without her now, and that's a fact. There isn't very much to choose nowadays, I think, between his love of Everard and of Everard's wife. And your sister is an easy first at managing him where he needs it. She practically keeps him alive for us, and we who love him owe her a great deal for that."

As the result of their being drawn closer together in their mutual anxiety, Everard, it seemed, had lately probed deeper than ever before into Pauline's constant craving, constant thought of the child she had given up nearly three years before. Weakened by long watching, in the reaction from sustained periods of nervous energy she had been less able to shut out of sight her groundless, yet, to her, terribly besetting fears for her little one's health and happiness. It is possible, even, that the fears themselves were more vivid, more en-

grossing, now that she was often tired in body as well as troubled in mind. So Dr. Martin, the self-appointed family adviser, suggested that Gertrude should visit the home where the little Pauline was sheltered; should bring reassuring news of her to her mother, on the chance of allaying, for a little while at any rate, some portion of that mother's care.

"She's lost faith in what I tell her," he said. "If I hesitate as to what colored socks the child had on she's ready to credit me with a made-up tale throughout. She doesn't say so, but it's plain to read in those great eyes of hers. She'd miss my reports as she would a narcotic that had become a custom, and be the worse for wanting them, but as a tonic they are worn out long ago. You could convince her as no one else could."

"Of course I'll go," said Gertrude. "Unless—couldn't she go herself?"

"I suggested that—as a sort of last resource—to Everard, it is so all important she should keep up. But he thinks it would only make matters worse; that she could not bear it. She has said as much herself, I believe."

"Of course I'll go," Gertrude repeated. "Don't you think I might even arrange to go regularly?"

"I don't know. Things lose their value so with repetition—try this first and we'll see how far it goes toward satisfying her. Use your eyes well—have heaps to tell her. How long is it since you saw the child at all?"

"A year, quite. That's Everard's doing."

"Well, they're his wife and his child; for the most part he must manage for them himself, you know. And

at any rate its left us something to fall back upon now, hasn't it?"

"Yes," Gertrude admitted unreadily. "It has done that." For time had hardly served to soften her estimate of Everard.

"I should like you to write now," Humphrey Martin went on. "Will you? Say you'll go to-morrow if you don't get a wire to the contrary—explanations can very well wait till you get there. I want to run down to New Town to-night and take a look at them, and I'll tell Mrs. Lomas you're going—if I think the news likely to help her. And I'll post your letter on my way. So I'm afraid you had better get to it. I suppose I mustn't spare myself much longer."

"I'll write it when you're gone," Gertrude said, "and I won't fail to post it."

"No, write it now."

"Well, why then?"

"Because there's nothing that pleases me like seeing you do a thing I've told you to do, Gertrude."

She got up, smiling. "What unfair advantage you take of your own goodness," she said, "to get your own way. If I write now I shall do it in the other room where all my things are, and"—she anticipated the words on his lips—"and I shan't let you follow me!"

"What unfair advantage you take," he said.

"Of what, pray?"

"Of being yourself. Well—so long as you write it and remember I told you to. Send those twins to amuse me and don't be gone long. I can't go without seeing

the twins. I want to thank them for resisting your efforts to drag them with you to this interview."

"Oh!" said Gertrude, "oh, how can you—" and went swiftly out on a remark half finished.

Yet was it quite sufficiently finished, after all, to give to a chance shot the seal of certainty.

II

THE twins bounded in to him almost immediately, laughter heralding their coming; laughter that was an echo of Gertrude's at its merriest, set in a higher key. With their abundant hair still hanging in shining plaits, their skirts longer, truly, but not yet long enough to shut out from sight completely their pretty straight legs, Bee and Babs, who might have been expected to change the most, were actually hardly changed at all from when Dr. Martin first made compact of everlasting friendship with them almost three years ago—at the time he first began to haunt the little house at Balham, with covetous designs upon its mistress.

They rushed at him with dancing, mischievous eyes; with a delightful freedom from all the restraint of self-consciousness, from any doubt of their welcome; taking up each other's words, finishing each other's sentences, or speaking in a rush and both together, in their old breathless way, that turned all they said into the picturesque plural number.

And hadn't she, they wanted to know, been just a wee bit kind to him, to-day? It was too bad of her not to be really kind, they thought so truly. They wished they could help him, though they admitted it must be at their own loss, but they did wish it and that was really,

truly too. Oh, then, they *had* thought of something. They had been meaning to tell him—Why didn't he try being ill? Why didn't he?

Dreadfully ill and white and thin and miserable, with an illness quite incurable until she, relenting, worked a cure all unexpectedly. Such a course might move her; in books it was an absolutely infallible recipe for softening the hard hearted of either sex—and he had never tried it! How wasteful of his opportunities! Why ever didn't he? And it would be such fun, they promised him, no they didn't mean that, with quick contrition—poor darling! Not fun for him to be ill!—but if it *worked,* wouldn't it be well worth while? Wouldn't it?

"We've read heaps of tales that come right like that, crowds of them, so why don't you?" Bee questioned.

"And Gertrude gets sweet over a pain, she does really. And it needn't be quite—Oh, shall we tell him, Bee?" Babs asked her sister.

Yes, they must tell him, wasn't it for him they had tried it? "We tried it for you," they told him, "and it did work beautifully; it's quite, quite easy and so interesting." So they shamelessly confided in him how they had shammed ill for a whole evening, just for his sake, and to see for themselves how their last discovered charm worked in miniature.

"And Gertrude got all lovely and motherly, and gave in to us about lots of things we'd been worrying her for for weeks," said the traitors. "And she didn't know a bit that it wasn't real, she never dreamt it, fancy! She never does make up a tiny bit herself, and so she never

expects any one else to, you see. Anybody she likes can take her in as easy, as easy, and that's why we never do deceive her about anything that really matters," they carefully explained.

"You do believe that, don't you? Don't you?" they pleaded with sudden earnestness.

He believed it implicitly, he assured them, with the earnestness to match that theirs demanded.

But they had to confess that the conclusion of their little comedy had been less dramatically successful than its commencement. For they had been forced to end it too suddenly to satisfy at all their artistic sense of fitness. Yet since even an abrupt close had not aroused Gertrude's suspicions, it didn't really *matter*, they reassured him. It was just as much a charm, at his service.

For it seemed they had been obliged to get well—or very nearly well—and quite beyond all occasion for tender apprehension, even beyond the absolute need of extra hugs and kisses, and with a rapidity that had irked them sorely in the doing. "Of course," they owned, "we said it was her precious hot mixture she'd nearly choked us with, and being in bed, you know; but it wouldn't have deceived many people done all in such a minute," they regretted, with yearnings after an ideal perfection that almost served to shadow, for the moment, their bright faces.

But how could they help it, they asked him, when Gertrude came creeping into their room in her dressing-gown; when they found her at their bedside unable to sleep herself and watching over them, her face almost

white and her eyes growing bigger and bigger and like Pauline's eyes, and her voice all soft and trembling?

"We couldn't bear it, even for your sake we couldn't bear it," they declared. "We had to get well quickly, hadn't we?" and acepted with evident relief his ready acquiescence.

"She does so hate any one to be ill if she can't mend them. It does make her so sweet and sorry," they said. "We are sure you wouldn't be able to keep it up for long—we couldn't—but then, of course, you would not need to."

"So do come with a pain, next time. You'll promise to just try it?" urged Babs.

"Where will you have it?" said Bee, the practical. "And it must be a pain that counts, not a toothache or anything like that. Something that you can't tell what it might turn into any minute; something Ger doesn't know all about, and with a serious name. You must think of something serious you can pretend, you know. And you mustn't smile. You do look so very healthy when you smile, don't you? Doesn't he, Babs?"

"He does look rather healthy altogether," Babs agreed. "You'd better choose a pain that needn't make you *look* too ill," she recommended.

"And don't forget," they considerately reminded him, "that when you have got her we shall spend half every year with you, because that's settled. We can't possibly spare her for more than that—when we're quite old we shan't be able to—for you see we've always had her. You do understand, you nice darling, don't you?

We are really rather generous to help you at all, aren't we? Just say we are."

He obediently gave his tribute of words to their undoubted generosity.

"It's because you're such a funny soul and so conceited about your ridiculous clothes, you know," they said, with the explanatory candor they never withheld—with their gay laughter to follow it.

But Gertrude came back, her note written, to rob him of further excuse for lingering. Her eyes rested on him kindly as he took leave of the little girls, after an exact formula frequently rehearsed; she gave him her hand and did not seem in such a hurry as sometimes to withdraw it from his strong grasp; she looked up at him for the moment he held her thus and her glance was still soft, still kind.

She followed him to the door, and there a sudden thought to his own possible advantage came to him.

"You might write and tell me how you get on?" he suggested.

"Yes," she said, "yes, I will." And then spoilt her concession to him with a characteristic touch. "You deserve that."

He turned back at the gate to take a last look at her, standing straight and slender in the doorway, with a pretty twin clinging to her on either side; and the echo of their raised voices, showering good-bys after him, followed him warmly along the road. But in his heart was a pain that needed no sham emphasis if only he could have bared it successfully to her sympathy.

"What I deserve will never satisfy me, Gertrude," he thought. "I want far more than that, my dear."

He posted her note with a slowly deepening smile.

"That's the worst of these dear unselfish women," he complained, "they work their victims so confoundedly hard."

And then he made the best of his way to New Town and old Dr. Lomas's bedside; to the very different home that was Pauline's.

III

ALMOST up to the time of her marriage the story of Pauline was practically the story of Gertrude and Everard, the two strongest influences of her life. But after that, with Gertrude's daily companionship withdrawn, with Everard's ascendency diminishing rather than increasing with constant contact, gradually her own character began to assert itself more definitely, more convincingly; and many traits that had always been there, partly hidden, or perhaps still undeveloped, now came strongly to light to disturb the calculations of the unreasoning, the short-sighted, the wilfully blind.

Pauline, in fact, was the possessor of what is very loosely termed a temperament, and slowly but surely those about her, those who loved her, awoke to realize it as a fact.

"You are the victim of your temperament," Humphrey Martin had occasion to warn her, once, in his capacity of doctor.

"Well, I won't be its slave," she told him, seeming to find a distinction in the terms to comfort her; with an assurance after events scarcely warranted.

It would have been difficult to find a greater contrast to the home Pauline left than the home she went to as Everard's wife, and Pauline was strangely, painfully susceptible to atmosphere in her surroundings. The

very thoughts of those about her were as actual in their influence as spoken words, and when they were sorrowful thoughts they weighed on her lightest mood to crush it and, even more easily than gaiety, could claim a response from her; and all the unvoiced regret that old Doctor Lomas expended on his son's slip from moral rectitude, she was as keenly alive to as if he had hailed reproaches at her unceasingly for her share in it.

To the old doctor, with his pure, sensitive nature, the false step Everard and Pauline had taken was one he viewed from an ideal rather than a universally possible standard; theirs was a sin he was bound to magnify in the clear depths of his own soul; and according to his vision was his judgment, given without harshness, without reproach—such was the man—but with an absolute certainty of condemnation that, to Pauline, was never for an instant hidden.

Into every evidence of his unfailing courtesy toward her, his increasing affection for her, she read the signs he thought he was hiding so carefully of his disappointment, his trouble. The more she came to love the tender old man, the keener grew her self-reproach, until the weight of it on that score alone was well-nigh unbearable. That she should have helped to shadow his last days, have been the cause of breaking up his dear romantic dream of a life unsullied for his romantically loved dear son, very soon became a trouble growing out of her new life sufficient, in itself, to darken it.

And then between herself and Everard perfect confidence had become impossible; truly they loved each other still, but it was with a love grown strained on both

sides, grown difficult of expression, grown almost irksome, since it was no longer upheld by that mutual understanding which is the very bulwark of love. Their difference of opinion about their child was the beginning of a general divergence in their point of view which, like a slow insidious poison, spread through their closely joined lives to set them further and further apart in spirit. Even the persistence of their self-accusations only served to sunder them; it was not often that Everard could forget that he had wronged Pauline, Pauline could never forget that she and Everard were wronging their child. The old glamor that had once made them all in all to each other and the world of no account so that they were together, that old deceitful glamor that had promised to surround them forever, had fallen asunder at a touch, had vanished beyond recall. Nothing they could do or say could bring back the old conditions that had served to fill, to satisfy them once. And in the new conditions was no satisfaction, no peace for either of them. The sweets of the past had turned bitter in their mouths, remembrance was a torture, and they were still too young to fully believe in the power of time to soothe, to numb their pain.

When sometimes Pauline would shudder and turn away from Everard's kisses he was forced to blame himself—it hurt him more than anything else could have done to blame himself. As gradually, but surely, Everard gave her less and less of his society, his consideration, Pauline had no reproaches to offer, no wondering self-pity with which to stanch the wound to her pride or her love. She looked at her sad eyes in the glass, ex-

cusing him as she looked. She was still only a girl, and yet she had forgotten it. The thought of her motherhood had crowded out every other thought, deadened her, in a measure at least, to every other consideration.

She saw into Everard's mind clearly enough to know that she was wronging him in many ways, misjudging him even. She saw clearly enough to realize sometimes, at any rate, that from his standpoint his actions had been at least as much determined by what he considered her benefit as his own; but her opposite view had become an obsession with her, she could not throw it off, could not change it, could not rise above it and the terrible depression it wrought in her. Day and night she was haunted by her longing to share her child's life, and by her devotion to it, free her own life from the curse she believed was laid on her by its abandonment. So absorbed did she become by the one overmastering idea that she grew almost glad that Everard should find distraction elsewhere, that he should often be absent, leaving her more and more free to indulge her grief unrestrained by the necessity his presence put upon her to attempt a brightness of manner which seldom proved anything but a piteous failure. Piteous even to herself, because to please Everard would have been her greatest pleasure; while, at the same time, that gaiety in herself under such circumstances should please him was her greatest relief.

If sometimes they were forced to open their hearts to each other it was with a cry of—"Everard, what a bad wife I am to you!" with "What sort of husband have I been, Paulie?" Once, when he tried to order her into a quieter frame of mind, commanded her in his own

words "to be reasonable," she looked at him disregarding the purpose of his words to probe into his right to utter them.

"There is something strangely binding in our marriage vows, I think," she said. "Though one so seldom deliberately thinks of them they seem to fill the air; they mean, put in practice, so much more than the mere words express that I wonder any one can utter them lightly."

"There's one you don't seem to take much heed of, Pauline," Everard said. "You promised to obey me, among other things, you know."

"Everard, don't I? Don't I do all you ask me?"

"Oh," he said irritably, "I don't want a slavish obedience in little things and an exception made of the one thing that matters. How often have I asked you to give up this foolish brooding about the child, and—honestly now—have you ever once tried to please me by attempting it? If you would only do that it would be obeying me to some purpose."

"If I could only do it to please you how gladly I would do it!" she said.

"And my word has no weight there?" he sneered.

"No," she said, "no, Everard. Little Pauline was born too long before my promise to obey you—your word, while it seems to me to injure her, has no weight there."

On another occasion, as they stood together at a window idly looking out, a woman passing arrested Pauline's attention—a wretched, draggled creature, unmistakably an outcast adrift from all the beauties of her sex.

Pauline clutched convulsively at Everard, her face turned white, her eyes strained.

"My dear, what is it now?" he asked.

"Oh that poor, poor thing!" she whispered.

He put his arm about her, smiling indulgently. "You are altogether too tender-hearted for this world, Paulie," he said.

"No, I'm not," she said. "Everard, I was thinking of myself. I was thinking that but for the grace of God there I should be!"

"Pauline!" he exclaimed, inexpressibly shocked. "How dare you!"

"It's what I feel," she said.

"You have no right to feel it, then."

"Haven't I? Oh, but I know I have! *You* know I have."

"You don't mind how you hurt me," he cried, and pushed her from him.

"I do," she said, "that's one of the worst things about it all, I mind so much."

"You can not mind, or would you be always doing it? Would you ever say such things? And look here—you're not to speak like that again, do you understand?"

She looked at him, seeming to slowly sum him up once more.

"I'll try not to speak like that again," she promised with a little emphasis of reservation on the "speak" that did not escape his ears. "And I didn't mean to say it," she went on quickly. "Everard, darling, I didn't mean to hurt you."

He came to her, put his arms about her again, his

mood of resentment, of anger, evaporated, as it nearly always did, in pity for his young wife, in pity for himself.

"Dearest, if only you could see things as they are," he said.

"But I do," she answered sadly. "What you want me to do is to see things as we should like them to be."

Then, before he could speak, she put her face to his, kissed him passionately.

"How I love you, Everard," she said, "if that were enough!"

But that it is not enough they had proved long ago.

IV

WHILE Pauline lived at home with her sisters she had always found plenty to do—Gertrude had seen to that. Needlework alone had occupied a great deal of her time, the necessary needlework of making clothes for herself and the younger girls. A not inconsiderable amount of housework fell to her share, and then there were the daily walks much insisted upon by the energetic Gertrude on the score of health, and all helping profitably and pleasantly to fill up the time.

And in everything there was companionship. To Pauline it was always quite easy to work at another's suggestion when others were busy too; and yet, as she was to find out later, almost impossible to work steadily at her own initiative—alone.

At the little house in Balham there was a constant coming and going; there was the idolized father to be seen off, with many pretty little ceremonious attentions, in the morning, to be greeted again at night; there were the high-spirited, shrill-voiced twins to be sent to school, to be welcomed from school, to be petted and played with, and made much of generally. There was Bella, with her important airs, her many girlish drolleries, forever bustling in and out to her teaching or her art classes, always with something original to say to make her sisters

laugh intentionally or unconsciously; and dearest, most necessary to Pauline of all, there was Gertrude with her cheery common sense and her refreshing self-confidence and her readily awakened, her inspiring bright laughter.

"I'm afraid we're a terribly noisy family," Gertrude would apologize sometimes, but how much the merry light-hearted noise had helped to make up the happiness of her daily life Pauline was to realize fully in the contrasting quiet and monotony of her father-in-law's house.

And there the victim of her impressionable temperament, she certainly added to the gloom as much as, in her old home, she had added to the gaiety; and Everard, who had hoped once to lift the weight of quietness, of dullness, from his life with Pauline's help, soon found how mistaken his hopes had been.

But Everard put it all to a change in her; blamed her in his heart always, and sometimes even in words, for letting her thought of their child drive out so much of her thought for him. And it was true that her trouble was at the root of her present attitude, but true also she might have set that trouble more successfully aside in other surroundings, in a fuller, brighter life.

Old Doctor Lomas had been blessed now for many years with the services of an excellent working housekeeper who managed, with the help of a maid under her, to keep the house in the primmest good order; who understood his modest requirements to a nicety, and was quite as equal to the more exacting requirements of Everard, whom she spoilt almost as persistently as his father did. It would have been absurd for Pauline, with

her inexperience, to interfere with a household so perfectly organized on its domestic side; such an idea never occurred to her. So that after her "Master Everard's" marriage, just as before, Mrs. Betteridge continued importantly to jangle her keys, to work wonders of self-imposed economy with the contents of the housekeeping purse, to arrange the meals, to mend the house linen, to shop, and cook, and polish, and darn with all the clockwork regularity of long custom, with the good result of entire competency.

"Can I help you, Mrs. Betteridge?" Pauline, at a loss for something to do, had ventured once or twice in the early days.

"Well, if you don't mind my saying so, Mrs. Everard, I can manage best as I've always managed. For when I know I've got everything to do I know when I'm done, and that's what suits me, if it's all the same to you," Mrs. Betteridge had answered; and thus Pauline was without responsibility with regard to the home, and without the occupation, the new interests, it might have brought her also.

And then in several little ways, petty in themselves but far-reaching in their results, Everard hedged her round with restrictions; helped to make her days empty and profitless. He liked her to be prettily dressed, but he seemed to consider it reflected on the dignity of her position as his wife that she should wear dresses of her own making, and Pauline found mere "fancy work" too unattractive to sit over in solitary state; her once busy needle grew almost out of use, as, slowly, her energy in inventing tasks for it waned with the passing of time.

And besides his objection to her working to amuse herself indoors, he was unreasonably fidgety about her being out much alone; when he was too busy to go with her he plainly showed he preferred her to keep at home, or to the immediate vicinity, the tiresome roads of New Town in which her interest was soon outworn. Pauline was painfully anxious to please her young husband in the ways that lay in her power; and, always liable to carry things to extremes, she shortened the long rambles she had found variety in at first, until it ended in her hardly going out alone, simply for a walk, at all, except when Everard turned disconcertingly round to insist on it.

Callers she had, of course, and calls to return. The Lomases were so well known and liked that Everard's pretty young wife was a good deal sought out, in the beginning, by the socially important people of the place, and might, so it seemed, easily have filled up much of her time with visiting, with such mild gaieties as a small town affords. But under the circumstances it was only natural she should shrink from entertaining or being entertained more than was absolutely necessary; that she should make as little as possible of her social obligations. The practise was too well established, had gone on for too long without any feminine assistance or backing up, for her to feel called upon to make great exertions on that score; and Everard, with almost all the responsibility and work thrown on him by his father's failing health, was too busy to accept many invitations with her, was too jealously inclined to care for her to accept many without him.

And gradually even those she had attracted most at

first with her charming face, her sweet and gracious manners, began to find something strange, something they could not fathom about her, and to draw away from what their understanding missed, as is the way all the world over. Haunted, sorrowful eyes in a bride's face had allured only by their novelty. Maturer thought judged them by a standard of propriety they were found to outrage. In some way or other, undefinable yet subtly penetrating, a sense of tragedy seemed to surround her, so that even the least observant could not escape it. And a tragedy in their midst that was not to be set aside, and yet found no means of expression, was again an outrage against the proprieties of a place that prided itself on knowing everybody's business, on telling all there was to tell to all who cared to listen.

"I don't know how to describe it, I'm sure; but there's something a little uncomfortable about her," the vicar's wife said; and what the vicar's wife couldn't describe was generally accepted as probably not too respectable: certainly not to be indiscriminately encouraged.

Pauline's visitors fell off, and Pauline was too wrapped in her own dreams to notice it. From being a center of attraction she became a topic of conversation—a decided drop in the social scale.

"She's got a lovely home, I'm sure," said a busybody, disapprovingly, grudgingly.

"I've no patience with a girl who has everything she can possibly want, and can't look pleased with it," said another.

"I wonder Doctor Everard stands it," said a third, and admiration for Pauline the alien's pretty face trans-

formed itself by easy stages into pity for Everard—well known to them all. For Everard was still popular in his native place although he had married outside it—a fact which, if it is duly considered, says a good deal in his favor.

Indeed Everard—although he was constantly resentful of his fate, which Pauline never was, being only remorseful, which is a different thing—Everard had at this period certainly the lighter burden, the easier path; his temperament helped him to it, and his work insured it for him.

His days might be long, but they were well filled, and the necessities of his profession freed him from the possibility of brooding on the past, to any great extent. It was a relief to throw himself heart and soul into the work ready to his hand, and he took advantage of that relief to the utmost. A disinclination to think kept him moving, kept him busy, and the practise certainly gained in consequence. Instead of clinging to the old doctor, patients began to maneuver for the attendance of the young one. His aptitude, his cleverness, began to be constantly talked about, with a continual increase in the calls on him as the result. As a medical man, at any rate, he more than fulfilled his father's hopes of him; almost, it must be admitted, to even his father's surprise.

Just so far as success outside his home will satisfy a man for a knowledge of failure in it, Everard Lomas was granted that satisfaction, since fate, that denied him happiness with one hand, made of him a capable doctor with the other.

V

THUS the months of their newly married life, filled with inaction and monotony for Pauline, with nervous energy and preoccupation for Everard, lengthened themselves slowly into years. Although the alteration in their looks, their manners, might easily have escaped a casual observation, yet that they were altered was, by now, pitifully plain to those who had their welfare near at heart. Sometimes it seemed as if the brightness was forever dimmed in Pauline's beautiful face; her low laughter rang with a distressing hollowness, with a too visible effort; her smiles grew more difficult, nearer to the borderland of tears. She responded with less and less readiness to gaiety in others; even her sisters found it hard work sometimes to rouse her into echoing their merriment; her husband, who needed to be awakened to merriment himself, rarely gained a smile from her.

As for Everard, by the very training of his profession he was rendered more capable of acting a part in public, and in company he was much the old boyish, easy-mannered young fellow who had first stirred Pauline to love. But when he was not actually talking for effect, making himself agreeable of set purpose, his fair, clean-shaven face looked much older; lines of discontent, of fretfulness, showed round his thin-lipped mouth; the expression of his light-blue eyes was restless, dissatisfied.

At home he was irritable, easily roused to ill-humor, hard to pacify; and his old tendency to blame every one but himself for all that offended him, becoming a habit, gained far more frequent expression in words as time went on. His health was permanently improved, in every way better than formerly, but for all that he was often obliged to work up to the very limit of his strength; and the strain on him found vent in fidgetiness about trifles, in exhibitions of temper that made him difficult to get on with, frequently impossible to please. His nerves were now almost habitually highly strung to a degree that would have made him an uncomfortable inmate in a home where he was only one of many, taking his turn in the general interest and consideration. But here, where to both his father and his wife he was the very center of the universe, his moods made themselves felt to a sharply painful extent.

Like Pauline he was constantly alive to the unspoken regret, the disappointment, that tinged his father's every thought of him—even the years did not serve to deaden it or its effect. And added to that, for his constant wounding, was the look of dumb pain, of distress and longing in Pauline's eyes which nothing he could do or say seemed to dispel—which sometimes seemed goading him to madness. His father's reserve was sacred; if it would have hurt him less to be openly blamed, as he often fancied, as he always said, he was at any rate powerless to take his choice in the matter.

But with Pauline it was different. Her very nearness and dearness to him put her more completely at his mercy. Although he had purposely set up the barriers

of silence between them concerning the vexed question of their child, yet often he found himself unable to bear her voiceless suffering any longer, and was forced by some resistless power within him to goad her into putting into words her sense of wrong-doing, her anxiety about the child and her craving for it; had to go through it all, although knowing—by how long an experience—the utter futileness of pitting his opinion against hers to turn her; although well knowing that, far from persuading him, her words would raise in his heart a very frenzy of impatience toward her.

Such scenes between them, if they did not grow more frequent, grew more violent and certainly more lasting, more lacerating in their effect. Whereas, at first, Everard never failed in his endeavors to blot out with subsequent tenderness, with endearments and soft words, the harshness he believed himself forced to use, later on reconcilement was more often left to come of itself, to time's uncertain discretion.

And then—just when it seemed to them both that nothing was ever going to change, except just to grow harder, less bearable, with ceaseless repetition in the same endless round; when they felt that for the rest of their young lives they were doomed to go on in the same spoilt, maimed way—then came old Dr. Lomas's long illness; and in the fear of losing him at first, and later on in the certainty that they must indeed lose him and very soon, their own personal troubles, their losses and their desires, grew dimmed in this mutual sorrow, as their separate interests were merged in this common distress.

Pauline, devoting herself to the loved old man, won occupation; felt herself of actual use in her world for the first time since her marriage. Everard, full of gratitude for that unsparing devotion, in the glass it served to hold up to the beauties of her nature, was shown many things clearly that had been hidden from him before. He was able, later on, when unaccustomed bodily tiredness and a continued strain made Pauline less capable of keeping up the reserve after which she had always striven, to tempt her into talking to him of the child, for her easement and without working himself into the state of intolerance and outspoken annoyance that had formerly always served to silence her. Although as incapable as ever of moderating his opinion, he was helped to, at least, a surface patience with hers. As the outward evidence of his anxiety for her health, both on her own account and on his father's, he drifted back into many of the pretty affectionate ways he had formerly used toward her and slowly allowed himself to drop. And to these signs of reviving love in him he found Pauline touchingly ready to respond.

Loneliness of thought seemed to Pauline in a great measure her portion, and that it should be so was sufficiently distressful to her since her natural impulse was to please in all things—so far, having always been much alone, she was more or less used to her lot. But an outwardly close companionship with those she loved was almost a necessity to her, however, if she was to wring the slightest happiness from life—Everard's conduct had made this plain to her since he had withdrawn the greater part of his daily companionship from her. It

is true that she had considered it a relief, at first, but true also that she had come to regard it as an added torture. Yet she was so constituted that unless he came to her of his own accord she was quite incapable of showing him how much she missed him, how constantly she needed him; she could respond to signs of love with a warmth that outsped his own, but she could never compel it. It took Everard, for his part, a long time to realize this, and it was characteristic of him that he always considered it particularly hard on him.

Late, as it may seem to others, he gained his first certain grasp of the fact, as a thing to be accounted for in the story of their married lives, the first time Pauline fainted after a prolonged attendance in his father's sick room.

The nurse who undertook the night duty was already established with her charge and Pauline's responsibilities were over, but she had lingered a little—the old doctor was wakeful, seemingly rather better than sometimes and, as always, loath to part with her. Everard had recently been up and, on going again, had told Pauline not to be long, as he wanted her downstairs.

He wanted, in fact, to lecture her on the folly of wasting her energies by overtiring herself; for he had noticed her looking unusually done up and pale, and had never any idea of picking his time for his lecturing with special regard for the recipient's feelings. When any one was plainly undeniably tired was to him the fitting opportunity to point out the foolishness of letting themselves become so; and if they resented, then, words they would have taken quietly at another moment, that showed

him a want in them, certainly, but no want in his own judgment. When, in this instance, Pauline failed to arrive downstairs to hear his prepared remonstrances, he started in pursuit of her with all the impatience to which he was so prone.

He found her a crumpled heap at the top of the stairs, overcome with faintness, and carried her down into the dining-room to put her on the couch there and busy himself in skilfully reviving her. It was not a severe attack, and he knew very well that he would have thought lightly of it in any one else. He was himself surprised, almost startled, at the unreasonable, exaggerated fears which beset him until Pauline began to look herself again. He was altogether so unused to any variation in her customary good health and strength, that his remonstrances, when he uttered them, were tempered with a tenderness and anxiety he was at no pains to hide, and this time Pauline found them only delightful.

The face that bent over her was sympathetically drained of color; she put her hand to his cheek, stroking it lingeringly.

"Why, what a foolish doctor to get whiter than his patient!" she whispered.

He could hardly believe her assurances when she pronounced herself quite recovered.

"You've given me such a fright already, I can't trust you," he smiled, and hung over her full of solicitude, of nervous apprehension; petting and gently chiding her in turn. He would not leave her even when he had her safely in bed, but sat at her side holding her hand, waiting until she should grow sleepy.

"But I never shall," she told him, "while you are there. I shall stay awake to keep you." She turned a little in the bed; drew his hand to her lips; covered it with kisses. "You've made it more than worth while feeling ill for a few minutes," she said. "I'm so strong as a rule, Everard, I've never known the compensations of being ill before." He knelt at the bedside that he might put his disengaged arm across her. "Will you turn up the gas just a little?" she coaxed him.

"Then you won't go to sleep."

"I don't want to. I want to be able to see your face."

"You see that often enough!"

"But never enough for me, Everard."

When he came back to her, the gas turned higher, she held her arms eagerly out to him.

"That's better," she said, "now I don't miss any of you. The bell can ring if it likes, Everard, but you're not going. You're mine, and I'm not going to give you up for any one." She gave a little soft, satisfied laugh. "Besides, I'm too ill to be left," she ended.

"That's better!" he echoed, "you don't know how much it pleases me when my grave little woman turns herself into a spoilt child."

"And I'm really not too old to be spoilt yet, am I?" she asked.

"No—thank God, no," he said. He drew back a little that he might look at her long and earnestly. Curled up in the bed, half sitting, half lying against the pillows in her white nightgown, with her soft bright hair all about her sweet face, with the trouble for once veiled in her eyes; with love, with contentment, shining in

them instead, she looked no more than a child still indeed; looked older than when Everard first fell boyishly in love with her.

"Am I pretty, then?" she asked him with a smile, to interrupt his long look.

"Oh, Paulie, yes!" he said, his voice choked with sudden regret, thick with emotion, "so young and so pretty —my dear! my dear!"

"And generally I feel so old," she said, "I feel that we both are. So old and so dreary, and oh, so far apart!" She had caught at his emotion to make it hers, to treble it in intensity as she was so apt to do. But for this time she pushed it resolutely aside.

"Not to-night," she went on. "I don't feel anything for to-night—but that I want you and that I've got you safely. I don't want anything more than that."

"I want you so often," she said presently.

"And often I am no further off than the next room," he said, with reproach in his tones. "From the drawing-room to the surgery, for instance, how far is it? A passage to cross——"

"Oh, Everard, you know I don't mean that only! It isn't enough to be in the same room with you when we are miles apart in other ways—when there are rows of ghosts, left behind by past quarrels, stalking in between us—my darling, I hate and fear the ghosts so, and sometimes the air is so thick with them. They seem everywhere, everywhere. There seems no escaping them, does there, Everard? Does there?"

He smoothed her hair, pushed it back from her forehead, drew it forward again, twisted the little curls

tighter with his fingers. To play with her pretty hair had been a trick of his once; it came to him again unconsciously.

"Don't think of them to-night," he said. He could not, either to himself or to her, pretend that the ghosts she spoke of, ghosts of disenchantment, of resentment, of disapproval, would never stalk between them again. He could only do his poor best with the scanty materials fate had left to him. "Don't think of them to-night, Paulie," he pleaded.

She held him tighter still.

"Paulie," he asked her, "when you are lonely and fancy I seem cross or far away, why can not you tell me? Why don't you, dear?"

"I can't," she said. "I want to tell you, but I can't."

"Because you are afraid?"

"I suppose so—I don't know. Because I can't. Because I am made wrongly, somehow. Because if once I should come to you—like that—and you repulsed me, it would kill me, I think——"

"You have turned from me, Paulie."

"I know—I know! I hate myself."

"But why should you be frightened of me? How can you be?" he asked. "And don't you see that it makes things sometimes rather difficult to me?"

"Why, yes," she said, "I see everything except the way to change myself into what I should like to be—a wife just good enough for you, Everard."

"You're too good as it is," he said, "that's at the root of the trouble," and would not be contradicted.

"You are happy now?" he asked her presently.

"Yes—oh, yes."

"Sometimes I've feared I'd lost the way to make you happy again even for an hour, Paulie."

"Dearest! dearest!"

He might have let well alone; might surely have been contented. But something impelled him from within; a remorseless power drove him and he had to go on against his will.

"Paulie, could you be happier at this moment? Tell me?"

But Pauline did not answer.

"Tell me, Paulie?"

"Yes," she whispered softly, regretfully.

"With little Pauline here?"

"Not here," she said; "asleep in the next room."

"Not here?" he persisted.

"Oh, Everard, never between us, to divide us! But with us, always under our care, where she ought to be. With us, to clear our lives from the stain of sin, as far as they can be cleared in God's sight—to win us His forgiveness." Then she pressed closer to him, almost fiercely, despairingly.

"Don't let me think, Everard, don't let me! Kiss me, dear. I want so to keep my happy hour, Everard. . . ."

But that happy hour was already sped.

VI

It was the next day that Everard, by way of a compromise that seemed even in his own eyes sadly feeble, suggested to Humphrey Martin that Gertrude might be persuaded to visit the little Pauline, and so, possibly, comfort the child's mother with news of her. Since he had openly objected to Gertrude's former occasional visits to the child's home, and had managed to put a stop to them, actuated by an overstrained sense of prudence, he now felt some diffidence in asking her himself to go again and as a favor. His relations with Gertrude, always difficult, had not grown more friendly during the years Pauline had been his wife; for Everard was particularly quick to detect and to resent signs of disapproval of himself wherever met with, a fact making his whole position more trying than it would have been to some, and Gertrude had never attempted to veil her disapproval—she gave him even more than his own fair share in her efforts to spare Pauline. So it was but natural that only the barest show of friendship, and none of its reality, was possible between them.

But to Gertrude, Humphrey Martin was always a willing messenger, a convenient intermediary, and it has been already shown that in this case he did not appeal to her in vain.

Having seen the child earlier in the day, Gertrude

reached New Town and Dr. Lomas's house about tea-time, and after all she came unexpectedly, as far as Pauline was concerned; for Dr. Martin had omitted to tell her of the proposed visit, realizing afresh, as he gave more thought to it, how suspense of any sort tried her. Everard happening, by a chance he considered lucky, to be at home and on the alert, was able to take the news of Gertrude's arrival up to her where she sat in the sick room. It was very rarely now that they left the old doctor alone.

"I am going to sit with Dad now, Paulie," Everard said. "Go and have a nice time with old Ger. If I'm wanted I shall get Mrs. Betteridge to come up, but we won't have you until Gertrude has to go, will we, Dad?"

"Go, dear; and give my love to your sister," the feeble voice said from the bed.

"I'm horribly vain," she lingered to say. "I never fancy any one can take proper care of you but me—not even Everard."

"A pretty thing to have turned me into a substitute with my own father!" Everard smiled. "You're a nice wife, Paulie!"

The old man's affectionate gaze followed her out of the room. "A good wife, my dear son," he said, with an intention Everard could not miss. "My boy," he went on presently, "once she preached to us all a counsel of perfection—such perfection as we sinners may attain to—and I thought it was unfitted for this world, or at least I tried to believe it was unfitted, and I urged her to set it aside. But the nearer I grow to the next world, and I am very near it now, Everard, the less certain I

am that I was right—that we were, any of us, right about the course your lives should take, except Pauline."

"Now, Dad, why on earth should Paulie's solitary opinion be more likely to be right than the united opinions of so many? And she a young and inexperienced girl; it isn't rational to think so." Everard spoke without impatience, without his old positive assurance, but with some show of an attempted assurance for all that.

To the unacknowledged doubt in his voice his father addressed himself.

"We can only act for ourselves in this life, Everard, to act truly," he said, "each one for himself and God alone to judge. There is such a thing as the sin of shirking responsibility, certainly, but there is also the sin of presumption, the taking too much upon ourselves, and the road between is very hard to find, and it is harder still sometimes to keep to it when found. Duties are very deceptive; the human heart is too often a traitor to the soul—" He paused, seemed to be thinking out a continuation, an elaboration of his subject; then seemed to abandon the attempt. "Before I go from you I want to tell you one thing that is troubling me—to gain one promise from you," was all he said, at length.

"Father!" Everard stammered brokenly, and the old man went softly on.

"I have practically told you of the trouble—that I believe I did wrong when I persuaded your wife, before she was your wife, to sacrifice the needs of her soul to what were, after all, the needs of a purely worldly convention. I believe that she was ready, aye, and able, to light over the dead ashes of her sin a burnt offering

that would surely have reached to God for her salvation and the salvation of the one dearest to her—you, my son. I believed—or at least I tried to believe—myself actuated by good intentions in what I did. I seem to see myself now as having been most culpably blind to the true good. My soul is going out to my Creator heavily laden with this thought, Everard."

"There isn't one man in a thousand who wouldn't thankfully change records with you." Everard, as he spoke, was watching his father with a professional as well as a son's eye. "Dad," he said, "surely the God you believe in so firmly is as merciful as you are? Think to yourself if yours isn't a case you would judge leniently?"

The old man shook his head. "But in my weakness I have never thought that sin should go unpunished," he said. "How could I expect that God in His strength should omit it where it is justly due? It is one of the tendencies of a luxurious, pleasure-seeking age to make much of the idea of God's infinite mercy, to make little of God's absolute justice. The terrible Jehovah of the Hebrews, to whose Purity sin was ever an abomination, was surely a far safer and truer conception of the All Righteous than the one we have chosen to accept to-day. Look round at the sin and disease with which the world is teeming, and tell me if God does not punish the wrongdoer? If His scourge does not follow Him to the third and fourth generation? And we ought to be thankful when He lets us have the opportunity of working out our punishment here. You had that opportunity, Everard, and I, your father, helped you to lay it aside." His

voice grew fainter. "I shouldn't shirk punishment for myself, I hope, if only I could bear it all and leave you untouched."

"Dad," Everard said quickly, "you wanted me to promise you something—what was it?"

"This: if ever there strongly presents itself to you the old choice over again between Pauline's way and your own way with regard to the acknowledgment of the child, that you will remember that on my deathbed—with, I believe, clearer eyes for what is really right and what only seems to us right because we wish it—I grew to admiration of her way as the best—as the only perfectly true and sure way, and that I died bitterly regretting my share in turning her from it. Will you promise me to remember *that*, if the occasion I have suggested should arise?"

For a moment or two Everard, the man, the wayward son, hesitated over the promise. But as he hesitated he still looked at his father's drawn, troubled face and his gaze was still mechanically professional. For an instant the man trained in him, the man natural to him, were at war over his answer. Then he bent down, speaking distinctly, soothingly, in a voice compelling attention, commanding respect.

"I give you my promise I will remember and carefully weigh your words if such an occasion arises," he said.

It was Everard the doctor who spoke, but his father, a doctor before him, was yet far from realizing that. His dim, fading eyes looked up trustfully, gratefully, into the young eyes looking down at him, and Everard, the son, moved hastily away.

VII

MEANWHILE downstairs, eager, thirstily, Pauline was drinking in every smallest detail Gertrude could find to tell her about her child. Gertrude had a retentive memory, she was always observant and accurate about all manner of facts that to many seemed merely trivial and beneath notice, and she had strained those natural faculties to their utmost in Pauline's service to-day. Beyond that, Gertrude had an absolutely sure insight into a mother's needs, and she had gathered more in the first five minutes of the things essential to Pauline's satisfaction than Humphrey Martin could ever find for her in long and repeated visits. It should be remembered how he had prophesied that it would be so.

Dr. Martin had been particularly successful in the home he had found for the little Pauline. During the last illness of her husband, he had been able to render a great many kind offices for a lonely young woman, now widowed, whose intense gratitude to him overflowed readily in affection toward the child he brought to her for protection and love. He was a man who seldom doubted himself or wavered in his estimate of any one—if he had ever doubted his wisdom in thinking of Mrs. Holden as a guardian for little Pauline, it died out to be replaced with a certainty of his right judgment,

while he first unfolded to her the pitiful story of the child's parents.

"Poor mother! Poor mother!" she had said. "Oh, I will do my best, you know that, don't you, for the child? But what is going to make it up to the mother?" She hugged her two-year-old darling tighter in her thin arms as she spoke, her thin young face alight with genuine sympathy.

"Tell her I will do everything I can, everything in my power, for her child. Tell her that I will love it for her with my own; that I pledge myself to make it happy."

And Humphrey Martin had told that to Pauline, not once, but a hundred times.

Yet it was not entirely on the child's account, nor even wholly on its mother's, that Dr. Martin was glad to establish it in Mrs. Holden's enthusiastic care. For one thing, it gave her a good deal to think about and to do, at a time when work alone could, even temporarily, banish sorrow. Dr. Martin had theories he spoke of always as "tremendous" concerning the effectiveness of work, in that capacity especially, and a weakness for forcing his theories into practise wherever he found it possible. And the Lomases, father and son, were alike particularly open-handed with the means at their disposal; the sum Everard himself proposed for the maintenance of his child was a liberal one, and Dr. Martin was glad to think the thin young widow and her own delicate child might derive some benefit from the money that came with little Pauline, to supplement a very inadequate income.

He had never told Pauline quite how small and poor

the home was where her child grew from a healthy baby into a healthy, happy romp, and he had cautioned Gertrude, from the first, not to enlarge on that particular, since it was one Pauline's anxious heart could so easily have magnified out of all importance to its significance.

That the child lacked none of the simple enjoyments and privileges of childhood; that it throve and ailed nothing; that, as it grew out of babyhood, it had the companionship of another child and always the love of a tender woman who was also a lady; these were the things which he rightly took into account, and Gertrude had always agreed with him about their paramount importance. Nor did they doubt that Pauline would have agreed with them also, could she have seen much of the child in its home; much of the mistress of that home and her way of filling the little lives about her with warmth and happiness.

But it had been decided from the first that Pauline was not to see the child she had given up; she had herself known that to make it final was the only way to make the parting possible. And Everard had done his best to foster the idea in her, to keep her to it, partly out of his ever-present fear of raising suspicion and partly because he honestly felt it the wisest course for her own sake. He might more easily have gone to see the child himself sometimes, but he did not even do that. Pauline, who knew him best, believed it was because, deep down in his heart, he shared far more of her love for their unacknowledged child than he would ever own to, and that he could not wholly trust himself to see her either.

So little Pauline was now three years old; was healthy and strong and forward for her age; had already much of the gay, captivating fearlessness of the young twin aunts she had never seen; already dominated her little world by the inherited right of her mother's beauty and charm; already reproduced, with curious fidelity, pretty tricks and ways that were her young father's. While mother and father alike were strangers to her, taking no part in her sunny life: with no place of their own in either her memory or her regard, counting for nothing in the tale of her childish days.

"How long are her curls, Gertrude? To her shoulders? *Past* her shoulders? Fancy—already, Gertrude! Do you think she is going to have long hair like the twins, or will it always curl itself up like mine? I'm glad it's going to be just like mine—is that vanity, dear? No—only that I want her all my own and—where is she like Everard? Surely she is somewhere like Everard?"

Pauline's questions were endless, tireless, and Gertrude had her tireless answers for them all.

"What were her shoes like, Gertrude? Were they the last I sent her, do you think? Everard is so nervous; he imagines all sorts of risks if I send her a parcel; generally I have to content myself with sending little things like shoes that Dr. Martin can carry to her in his pockets. Oh, Gertrude, won't it be strange when her shoes outgrow his pockets! . . . How have her socks washed, Gertrude? Do they look pretty on her? You remember I made them for her a

little while ago, and you said I shouldn't have chosen blue silk, that perhaps it wouldn't wash, but Everard is so fond of blue. I sent a little note in them and asked Mrs. Holden to give all the old ones away and only let her wear the new ones—Oh, Ger! it isn't really extravagant, or if it is, I can not help it!—It's the only way I can be extravagant about her. If I had her I could be always lavishing kisses and time on her, and that would satisfy me—I could be almost mean with her socks and things then, perhaps. . . . Did you take her shoes and socks off and kiss her darling toes, Gertrude? Gertrude! Did you? Did you? Oh, how sweet of you! Oh, my dear! . . . Has she a dimple to be kissed? My dimple, is it? Did you kiss it for me, darling? How many kisses? Oh, I am so glad she has my dimple! . . . Gertrude, why do I want her so like me when all the time I hate myself? Isn't it silly? —silly, dear?

"Is she really pretty? Would every one say so? Are you quite, quite sure? And she isn't a bit shy? No more shy than Bee and Babs? Oh, Gertrude, isn't it hard, hard? How Bee and Babs would love to pet and play with her, wouldn't they? Wouldn't Bella paint dear pictures of her for us? And dress her up and play ridiculous games with her? Wouldn't father make a lovely fuss of her? Is she going to be a little like father, Gertrude? Surely she must be a little like father, if she's so like me?

"Is she a good little darling? Do they tell you so? Is she obedient and sweet, and not really spoilt?—not spoilt at all? . . . What does she say for her little

prayers, I wonder? She would say prayers by now, wouldn't she?—And oh, Gertrude! Gertrude! who does she pray for? Think of her innocent prayers, with no father and mother in them, when they both of them need her prayers so much—so much!

"Ger, did you—did you bring me anything to keep from her? Any little thing she's played with or worn perhaps—my Pretty—Sweet! My Baby! I've wanted to ask Dr. Martin to bring me something from her so often and I have never liked to—he's the kindest of men, but he couldn't understand, quite, could he? . . . Have you, Gertrude? Really brought me something? Oh, Gertrude, how dear of you!—you dearest sister! There is nobody in the world quite so good to me as you are, sister, because you've always known me best."

Gertrude put her hand into her pocket; drew out the tiny stolen treasures, the little soiled and crumpled doll, the battered little shoe, and silently gave them up to Pauline's eager, trembling grasp.

Pauline got up unsteadily from where she had been kneeling beside Gertrude's chair. She did not speak—suddenly she was bereft of speech—and all she could do was to feast her hungry eyes on the poor little treasures, to press them against her face, against her aching heart.

For a few minutes Gertrude watched her through the unaccustomed mistiness before her eyes. Then, very quietly, she rose from her chair and went out of the room, to let herself as quietly out of the house. She knew that Pauline would not need her any more; that she had already done for her all that she could do.

A little while longer Pauline still stood where Ger-

trude left her. Then, all at once, she who cried now so seldom, so hardly, burst passionately into tears. She flung herself upon the sofa, still clutching like a child at her child's treasures; crying her heart out, as a child might, for the sweet plaything denied to her. And in those tears some little portion of a mother's bitter longing, for the time at least, was washed away.

So Everard found her when he came down at last. "Paulie! Paulie!" he said, distressed and rather weary; shrinking in every nerve from another scene.

But Pauline sat up at once; turned a tear-stained face to him; courageously smiled up at him; held toward him, for his inspection, a small soiled toy, a small worn shoe.

He looked down at them wonderingly. He recognized them at once for what they were, but for the life of him he could not think how he was meant to treat them; what safe, acceptable attitude he ought to take up with regard to them.

While he delayed, while he wondered, he took them from her; looked at them more nearly; turned them over in his hand. To him they seemed simply a very forlorn and grubby pair of little objects, and they touched no sensitive chord in his fancy; certainly suggested to him no touching or tender thing to say.

Then, on an impulse, he lifted them to his lips, kissed them separately before giving them back to her, and so, swiftly, effectually, did away with the need for any words at all.

For Everard Lomas had his inspired moments, with the best of us.

VIII

It was only a few weeks later that Dr. Lomas was called to his rest, his sure reward. The dear old man, by some secret process known to himself alone, had so managed to combine with his stern, almost puritanical, creed a perfection of charity in deed and thought toward all with whom he came in contact, that he was bound to be very deeply missed and mourned in the town where he had compassed, for so many years, so much useful, helpful work.

And to Everard and Pauline his loss was irreparable, desolating. Not until he was gone did they even faintly realize all his presence had meant to them; how much in the way of restraint and the outward sign of peace alone he had helped them to with his quiet, gentle influence. Everard might be narrow and rather selfish by nature, yet quite half his thoughts had been set by constant custom to following his father's thoughts and his father's wishes, and his father's generosity in criticism and infallible right judgment had formed a striking background against which his less admirable proclivities had attracted slight attention.

And Pauline, while her father-in-law had lived to stir her daily to emulation, with his meek bearing of his burdens, his unruffled patience, had never indulged to

the utmost her propensity for brooding, her power of turning her gaze inward to the needs of her own soul while she let the needs of others slip heedlessly by her. They were alone for the first time in their married lives, and it was a loneliness that made itself bitterly, persistently felt. A loneliness that their undoubted love for each other was yet not strong enough to overcome.

Their united conviction that they had spoilt for him his last years was only the stronger, the more piercing, when death divided him from them and there were left to them no longer any little simple ways in which they might keep up their penitence, their love before him.

And then to Pauline the immediate result of the abrupt end his death caused for all need for the sustained nervous energy to which she had strung herself so long, was an entire break down in her physical strength. The few days Everard gave her at first in which to rest and to regain her usually healthy condition passed into weeks and she was still pale and listless and weary; constantly ailing as she had never been before in his experience of her. She was too unused to feeling ill to be able to hide very successfully this new burden of aching limbs, of wearily aching head, and Everard soon became seriously alarmed on her account. Even Mrs. Betteridge, who had never seemed to take particularly to Pauline, being one of those good women who must always despise a "mistress" to fully appreciate a "master," even Mrs. Betteridge began to express anxiety and some tenderness over her altered looks, and took to haunting Everard in private in terms of conspiracy; with confessions of vaguely worded misgiving.

"It can't only be her black frock misbecoming her?" she queried. "There must be more to it than that, I take it. We've not been used to seeing her in black, certainly, you being such a one for light blue, and she always so ready to make almost a silly of you like with wearing it, but I must say I thought that black frock was about all the trouble at first, and I said to Jane, 'There's more in this wearing of mourning than meets the eye, Jane, it's for our sins it's ordered, I see it now, and to cure vanity and such'—Jane's a vain young piece of it herself—but it seems to me we've had time to get well used to it now, and that she's had time to pick up her color. You don't mind my drawing your attention, Master Everard, to her not looking as she should look?"

"I haven't approved of her looks for some time past myself," Everard said, standing frowning and helpless among his books and his bottles.

Mrs. Betteridge waved a muscular arm in the direction of the rows of neatly labelled bottles, in the universal efficacy of whose contents she had so far greater faith than poor Everard could pretend to.

"Give her a dose," she said, "a bottle of something, Master Everard. No, better than that, you just hand it over to me and I'll see that she takes it. She's one of those who need their very meat and their drink, and above all their physic, put into their mouths before they'll take the trouble to swallow it at the best of times, and if you'd left it under her nose ten to one she'd forget it; but I shan't forget—I've too much to do to forget much. You make up a nice big bottle full, Master Everard, and write on it plain, and leave it to me to give

it her. And don't you worry, my dear. I know you're a sight fonder of her than any one would think to hear you on her at times; I've known you long enough for that, Master Everard. So don't you worry. We'll cure her between us."

Everard gave Mrs. Betteridge the desired bottle of "physic," partly because he had no better suggestion with which to outweigh her fixed determination to administer it, and partly because he believed that in her weak state a tonic could at least do Pauline no harm. Pauline took her daily doses obediently, and received no apparent benefit from them except the indirect benefit of a footing of greater intimacy and good will with her self-appointed nurse. And before the end of the second bottle Mrs. Betteridge's faith unexpectedly failed her.

"You *swallow* it all right," she said, as though that was the particular wherein the healing powers of most medicines went astray. "But what good it does you I'm sure I couldn't tell any one."

In her next confidential talk with Everard she produced a new "infallible cure," however, for good Mrs. Betteridge was not one to lightly succumb to obstacles.

This time she ordered her young master to take his wife away to the sea, ordered him in very much the same tone as years before she would have "thanked him" to take his muddy boots off on the doormat before crossing *her* hall on a wet day. Since it was a course Humphrey Martin had been strongly urging him to adopt, and one he could himself almost hopefully believe in, Mrs. Betteridge very triumphantly again had her way.

"Well, my dear," she said to Pauline, "well, Mrs. Everard, my dear, I mean, I've got something for you that'll be some good of I'm hoping at last. And we'll throw the rest of the physic down the sink; I will, at least, for I doubt if you'd know where to look for the sink in this house if you wanted it, would you? And you won't be likely to want it while my old legs, that aren't what they were, still carry me upright. You're to go to the sea—now what do you think of that?—and Master Everard he's going to take you and give himself a rest at the same time. And not before he wants one, either, for he's a regular wonder for work—beats even his dear father there, I must say. And you never would have thought he'd be like it, either, just to think of the time he'd waste as a boy, teasing and annoying the maid and lolloping about like a great idle baby in my way, and his poor father fairly having to stand over him and his books, evenings. And now he seems so set off he can't stop for anything whatever, morning, noon, and night the same. But he's got to give in now for a little bit, and a good job, too, for both of you. We've only got to settle on one of those young stopgaping fellows and away you go. I meant to tell Master Everard, if it was all the same to him, I like 'em best not so young—as middle-aged as possible. I find they're easier to please in the house, or anyhow I don't feel so responsible for them when they're out of it. You've no idea how nervous I get, Mrs. Everard, in case one of those bits of boys should be up to some monkey trick that'd bring disgrace on us all; cutting some one about when a bottle of physic's all that's wanted, just to

show themselves handy at the job, or something of that. And to my mind one a bit older must look better to the patients; they seem to take to Master Everard in a way I didn't expect, considering his looking such a boy even yet, and my knowing so well what a great silly he can be when the fit takes him; but a stranger's a stranger, and it's best to be careful. But I'll think of that to tell him to-morrow, and don't you trouble your pretty head about it, anyway."

Pauline smiled her charming, grateful smile at the now garrulous housekeeper, and the gratitude was by no means assumed for a barrier to friendship broken down: her lonely life held so few real friendships—her heart would have held so many. And just the simple touches concerning Everard's boyhood that Mrs. Betteridge in her new mood was constantly bringing up for her, were what she had always longed to hear.

"Now I know how you used to spend your wet half-holidays, Everard," she told him the next time he wandered in to see how she was feeling, as he had contracted a restless habit of doing since she had seemed so far from well. "You used to spend them annoying and teasing the maid—used they to be pretty maids, I wonder? And lolloping—think of it! lolloping in poor Mrs. Betteridge's way! How did she punish you, Everard?"

"With hot cakes for tea generally, I think—and the hot cakes did it properly! Are you better this afternoon, Paulie?"

"There's never anything the matter with me," she declared, a little impatiently. She got up from the sofa. "It's only that you have turned into a ridiculous old

molly-coddle, Everard, and turned Mrs. Betteridge with you."

She moved about the room a few minutes, exerting herself to move briskly, then turned whiter than ever, and would have fallen but that Everard caught hold of her just in time.

"Sit down," he said, forcing her back on the sofa. "Sit there and keep still, for goodness' sake! Oh, Paulie, don't *you* be ridiculous, then; my nerves won't stand it; they won't indeed! You know you've hardly the strength to move, you know it perfectly well, and you suddenly go bustling about just for all the world as if you wanted to frighten me. How on earth I'm going to get you away I don't know if you don't mend at least a little first."

"I will mend—I really will, Everard—and I really can do a lot by trying when I've anything definite and not too far off to try for. It's only the worry in my head gone down into my silly legs, I think—" she laughed faintly up at him.

He sat down beside her, and drew her head upon his shoulder, brushing back her hair.

"Poor little head! If the 'worry' had left that alone, we wouldn't trouble so much about the legs. But the 'worry' hasn't left your head, has it, Paulie?"

"No," she said, "no, it goes on and on, Everard, till I think I'm going mad of it; till I tremble all over to think what it might drive me to. Oh, Everard, I do want to be good to you, I want to be happy with you, and I can't! I can't, because I've lost the way!"

"Hush! hush!" he said. "You mustn't talk like that;

I—we must get out of this. We'll get right away from everything and everybody we know, and see what that will do. You'll pick up by the sea—you'll try your very best to get better there for my sake, Pauline, and you're safe to manage it then. And—and I'll try my best to help you, my poor little dear. Oh, I know I'm as bad tempered and impatient as they make them, I know that well enough. We'll clear out of this house for a good five weeks at least—I wish it might be for always, but there's not another would do for us, worse luck—it's no better than a tomb since the dear old Dad was taken. No wonder you're ill in it; it gives you the creeps, that's what it is. I know it gives them to me."

IX

As Pauline said of herself, she could accomplish a great deal by trying. She tried very hard to get sufficiently better to allow of a journey, and managed it fairly well; she tried very hard to at least appear stronger while they were away, so that Everard might gain some pleasure from his well-earned rest, and that, too, she managed with a measure of success, but to get really well was apparently more than she could do, or perhaps she did not try quite hard enough for that.

Slowly Everard set his hopes to dim his judgment, and with their aid began even to see the improvement he wanted to see, not because it was actually there, but because he so keenly desired to see it. He spoke in an authoritative tone to Mrs. Betteridge on their return of the good effect the change had wrought. But for a strictly professional opinion, as his purposed to be, it seemed to need an unusual amount of bolstering and repetition, and Mrs. Betteridge, for her part, looked keenly at Pauline, and as the result of that scrutiny, waved all Everard's "talk" unceremoniously aside.

"You may be a very clever doctor out of the house, Master Everard, and they tell me you are," she said to him with the unabridged candor he only did not resent because he had grown up with it, "but in the house

my eyes are as good as another's, though they're not what they used to be. Without spending time and money at expensive schools and hospitals and the like, I can see as far through a brick wall as most people, I hope, and I say she's no better to speak of, and sickening for something on top of it all."

And Mrs. Betteridge was right. Pauline's nervous prostration, difficult enough to deal with in itself, was further complicated by a severe attack of influenza that she had caught, it seemed, on the journey home, or just before it, or just after it, caught after the unexplainable fashion of such things, and at a time when she was least fitted to stand it, as Gertrude said, "of course."

And for a while it seemed as if the closing chapter of Pauline's shadowed story was already written, as if there only remained the sad word "finis" to add. For what, to those who loved her, seemed an eternity of suspense her life hung in the balance, and even Humphrey Martin dare not risk a hopeful prophecy, not even for the possibility, appealing so strongly to him, of bringing comfort to Gertrude.

For Gertrude had thrown the home duties she generally considered so binding to the winds—or to Bella, which to her was much the same thing—at the first appeal of Pauline's necessity, and she and Mrs. Betteridge outvied each other in miracles of patient endurance for the sake of the dear sister, the pretty young mistress each loved so truly in her own way.

"You'll excuse my saying so, miss, but I didn't take to her so overmuch at first," Mrs. Betteridge confided to Gertrude, " but then, I was so taken up by the old

master, who was always too good for this world, that I hadn't much time for looking about me. But now I know what I know of her, there's no one I'm willing to set above her, and if anything happens to her I'll never forgive myself—never."

"But what could you have done that you haven't done?" Gertrude asked.

"There's that half-bottle of physic I emptied down the sink—it comes up again in my thoughts constant to accuse me. It was a fair flying in the face of Providence to throw good physic away, and run after these new-fangled notions of change and the like, and at my time of life I ought to have known better. Master Everard hasn't any need to blame himself, because that's the sort of mischief-making nonsense they pick up at these examinations and places, but I ought to have been able to tell the difference between a fresh egg and an addled one, as one might say, and I actually up and persuaded them to it—bullied them into it I should almost say, miss—and this is what's come of it. May God punish me for a meddlesome old fool in any way but by taking her off, and she so young and so dependent! And, come to that, what me and Master Everard would do left alone goodness knows, for what with having an evil conscience thrust upon me when I least expected it, I know I should have less patience than ever I've had with his tiresome, fidgetty ways—touching every blessed thing he comes across and leaving them all anyhow. And as for him, if he's a bit twisty with her times, he's always been like it, and it comes of his not being a strong boy, and me and his father making

it up to him for not having a mother more than was anyways good for him. If God had meant that boy to have a mother, he'd have had a mother; I always said so; but there! the old master never could see it in that light, and I couldn't ever cross him, no, nor argue him either, and Master Everard has some wonderful taking ways of his own for wheedling round a body now and again, and putting them off their guard, so to speak. And, twisty or not, he loves his wife with all the love he's got in him, and to see him without her will fairly break my heart. I know it will."

And Gertrude's practical nature forbade her to encourage unreasonable hope in herself or any one; she too could only rebelliously prepare a heart for breaking. For she had nothing at all for her support at this sad time but the fact that Humphrey Martin was giving them every moment of his valuable time that he could conscientiously abstract from his other duties, and on Humphrey Martin she had slowly grown to rely to an extent that still surprised her without surprising any one else.

The look in Gertrude's eyes, superseding her accustomed calm fearlessness, became almost a challenge to Humphrey Martin during the critical stage of Pauline's illness "Save my sister for me, and then ——" though Gertrude's look only began and never finished the sentence, we know that this man had prepared the ending long ago out of the love for her that so constantly beset him. But the saving of Pauline was in higher hands than Humphrey Martin's; she seemed to have passed beyond the line where his skill might decide

this matter of life and death for her. There followed days when he avoided Gertrude's eyes—they touched his affectionate, helpful nature too nearly; the illusive hope that his head rejected maddened him with the uncertain issues of life, and almost served to unman him.

That Gertrude must suffer became at least as terrible to Humphrey Martin as that Pauline must suffer was always terrible to Gertrude. That possibility of being wounded, tormented by another's ill, is always the peculiar privilege of the strong, and these two were alike in their strength, in their power of being absorbed in another's life, another's joys and sorrows, without losing anything from their own prominent personalities.

And between them was only Pauline—Humphrey Martin had long been sure of it—Pauline as Gertrude saw her, the center of her life, from whom she would not or could not take her eyes. And now Pauline seemed slipping away from them, seemed dying, and Humphrey Martin dare not meet Gertrude's look because it cut him to the heart; because he was powerless to do the one thing for her that she asked him in it.

X

As for Everard, how he lived through that time he never knew, and what it meant for him in the way of breathless, agonizing suspense was utterly beyond his power of expressing. Among the rest, clinging to each other's company for the assuaging of their grief, the deadening of their fears, he was markedly, miserably alone.

Under a surface armor of apparent, of engaging candor Everard had always managed to hide a great deal of his true feelings and a great deal also of his better self. Without being remarkable for them, he had some depths, as we all must have, and to these he had never admitted any one but Pauline; and now Pauline was lying upstairs lost to everything in the delirium of fever, in the unconsciousness of extreme exhaustion, sinking, dying, and there was no one else he could turn to—if to pour his troubles out to some sympathetic ear might have lightened them, it was a means of relief he never for a moment thought of trying.

As often as he could he shut every one else out of her sick room and himself in with her. Especially while the fever lasted, and her voice ran on and on through the troubled nights telling again and again the sorrowful story of her ever-present sense of sin, of her conviction that there was one way only out of sin, and

that a way denied to her; one open road to repentance that to her was shut, was barred; telling again and again—with how much pitiful detail—how as a mother she mourned her child perpetually and would not be comforted—while fever loosened the bonds of reticence for Pauline, Everard did his utmost to prevent the secrets of her heart going any further than his own tortured ears.

And as he kept his long night vigils beside her a great deal of his own soul was laid bare to him as well as the soul of his wife. If any thought that his fear of losing her bounded all his grief they sorely miscalculated the weight he had to bear. For remorse sat there with him, holding him in bondage to the undying cruel power of the past: the cankerous, unavailing remorse of the man not prepared to seek even such poor ease as penance offers.

During those nights, while Pauline, tossing to and fro upon the bed, endlessly repeated the tale of her woes, Everard would often speak aloud to her, as though she could still understand him, as though even now he might reach the springs of her reason through the twisted labyrinths of her fevered brain. So he would gently argue with her, persuade and entreat her, and just while he was speaking she would sometimes lie quite quiet, with a delusive air of listening, of taking in his words. But when his voice was still, hers would take up the monotonous repetition of all she had said so many times already, and again the sharp sword would pierce his soul, his old passionate resentment against his fate surge up within him.

And always before he left her he would beg her to be still, to be dumb, at least until he could come again to shut the door on them, on their trouble, his and hers. He would bend over her, his face wan and aged with the searching morning light upon it, and draw the tumbled bedclothes straight and neat about her, covering up her restless arms, tucking them away, only that she might fling them out again above her head, across the coverlet—undoing in a moment his vain task, as he knew so well she would do.

"Paulie," he would whisper, "don't, my darling. Let me cover you up before I go. I can't bear them to look at you, to touch you, Paulie; you are all too sacred; all too much my own. Oh, sweetheart! this is killing me—lie still! lie still! Try, dearest, very hard to understand—who is it speaks to you?"

And she would answer back, calling him by his name, for she always knew him; mingling cries for him with her other cries all the while he was away.

"Oh, Paulie," he would entreat her, "my darling, my darling! Don't tell them all these awful things—they are things that belong only to you and me, Paulie, to no one else in all the world; can not you wait until I am back and alone with you? If you only knew what you were doing, Paulie, you could never hurt me so. Or, if you must go on with it, can't you just wait for me to come back again? Can't you, dear? I earned the right to share your sorrow with the cursed wrong I did you, but this is more than I can endure." He would take her hand, kneeling beside her.

"O God!" was his cry, "haven't we been punished enough yet?"

"Now," he would whisper with his face against hers upon the pillow—"now say you will be quiet, love, at least until I come again. Say you will be good to me while I'm away."

And she would smile at him a wandering, uncertain smile, laden with the hopeless effort of her mind to reach his meaning, and with his eyes grown dim, his mouth painfully twitching, he would turn away from that sad smile that could promise him nothing of the things he so sorely needed, craved so earnestly.

Every time he left her thus they noticed that he looked more drawn, more altered, more wretchedly ill. New lines were marked on his face, deep lines that were never wholly smoothed out again, and this was the time when he lost forever the curiously boyish aspect which had seemed so much a part of him; that some had thought he would carry on with him through life as few men do. When Pauline began to study his face again she cried out at the change in his eyes. "I left a boy's blue eyes, Everard," she said. "Oh, what a shame! What a shame! Where are my boy's blue eyes?"

He passed his hands over them and did not speak.

"Did you cry the color away?" she asked him.

"No, I do not think so," he smiled sadly at her. "It went too deep for tears."

There were tears in her own eyes as she looked. "They used to be so blue, my dear boy's eyes," she said, "and now the color's lost because of the pain in

them!" But it was not a physical pain, and it had come into his eyes for good in place of the color, the youthful light she mourned.

For Pauline did not die, and the fever that racked her very slowly but surely gave way at last to the skilful treatment and care lavished upon her. The exhaustion following in its turn was fought with and conquered to a degree; every day she grew a little stronger and a little stronger for quite a number of days that, compared with the breathless, anxious time past, seemed peaceful, seemed almost blissful, and then while she was still just within that border-land where any relapse might so easily prove fatal she seemed to stick again, and all their efforts were unavailing to move her forward.

This was the phase through which Everard's reserve did not altogether serve to carry him. When it had been going on some time, to the distraction, the perplexity of every one concerned, he followed Humphrey Martin down from Pauline's room one evening and called him into the surgery, where he might consult him without interruption.

But when Dr. Martin was well established in his favorite attitude upon the hearth-rug, Everard sat staring moodily before him for the moment speechless, as though the effort to put words to his thought was after all proving too much for him. In the end he cleared his throat noisily and said what he had to say very rapidly, in a voice that was harsh and slightly raised.

"Look here," he said, "do you think she isn't trying to get any better, and that that is at the root of

this standstill? That she's sick of life and lacks the will, the incentive to live?"

Humphrey Martin's prominent eyes looked straight over Everard's head; he appeared to be purposely obliterating all hint of expression from his features, but for all that he did not hesitate in his answer.

"Yes," he said, "I think that's it. I've thought so all along."

Everard sprang to his feet. "Thank you," he said. "That's all I wanted to ask you. I just wanted to be certain you agreed with me, that's all." He shook himself impatiently. "I get so damned fanciful, sometimes, I'm afraid to trust myself." He laughed a toneless laugh that stuck in his throat and seemed to rattle there. "It's so much easier to be sure you're seeing straight when you're looking at some one a little further from you than your own wife," he ended.

"Can I do anything for you?" Martin asked. "I ought to be able to fit a sermon to almost any text after all my practise, and you know how much I am at your service, my dear fellow."

"No," Everard said. "No—you're a—a brick, Martin—I—upon my soul I don't know how I'm ever going to thank you for the half you've done! But this is a thing I must see to myself. There's a way I've thought of, and I believe it's the only thing to serve, though at the same time it's the last thing I should have chosen if there was any choice left—but here goes."

He hurried out of the room, leaving Humphrey Mar-

tin to his own devices, to go or to stay unconsidered and unattended, and generally Everard was something of a stickler for manners. Martin crossed quickly to the door in time to see him rushing three steps at a time up-stairs. "He must be pretty sure, to go at it like that," he commented. "I believe I've always given him credit for some brains, and he seems to be developing more brains, and heart, too, than I anticipated. I wonder if it can be— Well, if Gertrude's in the drawing-room I'll wait and see."

Gertrude was not in the drawing-room, but she came in almost directly.

"Everard has just turned me out of Pauline's room—" she began.

"Everard has just left me alone in the surgery in the most unceremonious fashion after inviting me in. Sit down and let us devote half an hour to taking Everard's character away—at least until he comes to excuse himself, if he can."

"Do you think he can?" Gertrude asked with an emphasis that went deeper than her words.

"Well, I shouldn't be so surprised if he manages it to-night as I should be sometimes," said Humphrey Martin.

When Everard came down to them his face was set and very white, and that he was holding a tight rein on strong restive emotions, that he was passing through some acute stage of mental suffering was plainly written on his features for Humphrey Martin, at any rate, to read. He sank exhaustedly into a chair opposite the others, but he shaded his eyes with a weary gesture of

his thin, nervous hand. His voice was sharp and strained.

"I'm glad you're not gone, Martin," he said. "I want to tell you, as well as Ger, what I've just done—it'll save me something to get so much over at once. I've just promised my wife that she shall have the—have our child to live here—that it shall be fetched as soon as she is strong enough to bear the excitement, and that she shall not be asked to part with it again. She has promised me in return to do her utmost to try and get better, and I haven't the slightest doubt that she will progress—and progress rapidly—from now. It is an extreme measure, I know, but I felt driven to it, I couldn't see any other way that one could thoroughly depend on. Unless she could be induced to help us by her own efforts there was practically no chance of saving her. And I had tried all inducements but this one."

"You're quite right," Humphrey Martin said deliberately. "Yours is the one dependable course left."

"You think so?" Everard asked sharply.

"I'm sure of it—thought so all along."

Gertrude, flushed and startled, looked away from the two men, and began a sentence only to hesitate over it, to leave it incomplete after all.

"Everard, you are not going to—you can not be going to——"

"No," Everard said comprehendingly. "The child is to be known as our adopted child, Pauline understands that. And that we should suddenly adopt a child while we're quite young enough to have some of our own will look sufficiently peculiar to set the tongues of New

Town wagging, I know very well, only if it's a choice between Pauline's life and wagging tongues what real choice is there left to me?"

Though his words held a question no one answered it.

"And that satisfies your wife?" Humphrey Martin questioned instead.

"Oh, it very thoroughly satisfies her, as you will see," Everard said. Then his voice dropped and he added half under his breath, as though the words were propelled out of him by the force of a will stronger than his own, "satisfies her for the present."

"For the present?" Gertrude echoed.

"Yes," he said, "for the present, Ger. And it seems I've no right to provide for more than the present; that I've no opportunity of doing so, anyhow."

"And whatever will people say?" she asked, putting words to the one bondage which always held her fast in spite of her strength and her fearlessness in other respects.

"Goodness knows!" said Everard, who was so fully her fellow sufferer in this. "But some very nice kind things, or I don't know much about them! And as for that, the gossips have had their fling at us already. I'm pretty certain of it. Exactly what they suspect about us they know no more than the dead, I fancy, but things get 'into the air,' as Paulie always says, and while only in the air are quite enough to damn the innocent, let alone the guilty, I suppose. The dear old Dad was taken ill in time not to notice it, and Pauline wouldn't—I'm really not sure but that Pauline may even have welcomed it if she did notice it—but I know very well that already our

social position here is not what it was—that we've had the cold shoulder more or less delicately turned on us in several directions that I could mention. The practise hasn't suffered yet; there's the old Dad's reputation to thank for that, and I've been lucky in pulling through some rather ticklish cases and lucky in having a bit of an ass as a rival. I'm not so branded yet that they'd prefer to trust their precious skins to the tender mercies of a noodle, the risk of it's too evident to them so far. But this will give me another doubtful attribute or two, and it's possible that before long some portion of them will even prefer the chance of being unnecessarily put under ground by a man who is as openly moral as he's openly thick-headed, to employing a man whose morals they can't either openly blame or approve. Oh, I'm not moving blindfold, Gertrude." His voice dropped despairingly. "But it means Pauline's life, and what else can I do?"

Humphrey Martin had been looking keenly from one troubled face to the other while keeping silence himself.

"There was simply nothing else to be done, my dear fellow," he said now. "And Miss Gertrude thinks so too."

His presumption in speaking for her Gertrude passed over unheedingly. A new thought had come to her to further her distress.

"Everard, you haven't seen the child," she said. "You don't know how like Pauline she is. Although she's such a baby still she's the very image of her mother where—where she's not just like you."

"If I haven't seen her I can quite believe it," Everard said. "I don't see that our feet have ever been

spared one sharp stone along this road. After all it's only one thing more among many."

He got up to wander out of the room, afraid perhaps of what more he might be led into saying of the things so near his heart, or perhaps only a prey to the bodily restlessness that accompanied all deep feeling in him.

Humphrey Martin turned at once to Gertrude.

"You know," he said, "that just like that poor fellow there, there is nothing that could possibly weigh in the scale of your desires against your sister's life and even the partial chance of snatching some stray happiness for her."

"No," said Gertrude, "there is nothing could really do that, but——"

"Ah!" he stopped her, "cling tight to the main thing and have no traffic with 'buts.' You can't afford to encourage 'buts,' Gertrude. And I'll tell you a secret, my dear—on the wrong side of twenty there is no one who can."

"I must go up and see Paulie——"

"Yes, go up and see Paulie. For once poor Paulie is in a position to comfort you."

"Good-by," she said absently, and gave him her hand.

"Good-by," he said, and held her a moment. "Who are you disappointed in, Gertrude?"

"Myself," she cried, and broke away from him.

"And we're all of us that," he said to an empty room. "But I'm not disappointed in you, Gertrude, and that's the great thing—to me."

XI

If Everard had any doubt in his own mind of the infallibility of the means he had so unexpectedly taken to insure Pauline's speedy recovery, he never put it into words—it was not large enough for that. And in a day or two, in a matter of hours even, the charm he had applied began to do its work; the occasion for doubt was fully over. In a time incredibly short, considering how ill, how near to death, she had so lately been, Pauline's good constitution, added to her determination to get swiftly better, had served to establish her well on the way to a complete return to her usual health.

But until she had quite thrown off the unavoidable period of invalidism, even Pauline was willing to delay the home-coming of the little child whose baby hands had served, across the distance that divided them, to guide her back to life.

"I don't want her to know her mother first as a thing of shawls and smelling-bottles," she said. "I want her to have everything as bright about her as we can make it." She went back to the first cry of her maimed motherhood. "Oh, Everard, I want to give her a happy little life to make up for what we did not give her! Surely we can keep her happy—you and I together?"

"Everard," she would cry a dozen times a week,

"don't you really think I shall be quite myself by Sunday? Not by the next, darling? Are you sure you are not saying that to tease me?"

Every time he came in she had something fresh to tell him. "Now I've been looking in the glass, Everard, and I'm sure I'm ever so much fatter in the face than I was yesterday. If you keep me on this sofa much longer I shall be grossly fat, and you won't say I'm pretty then; you know you don't like fat people. And just look at my hands, aren't they improved since yesterday —aren't they really? I can almost hold them down without my ring moving—it will be rather too tight soon, I think; see, Everard, if it isn't getting tight now?"

She held her fingers down to show him the marvelous improvement in their size; when the loose wedding-ring went slipping, slipping, she refused entirely to notice that, shook her hand a little even to further emphasize her fine disregard of such a tiresome thing as fact. Everard caught the thin white fingers in his own, pressed the ring back with kisses, covered her hands upon her lap with the warm shawl that was wrapped about her slender frame. He wandered out again, unable to speak; he had never known her so persistently bright in all the time of their marriage as during this little time of her recovery, and there was a pathos in her every smile that wrung his heart afresh, that stabbed him in every place where he was vulnerable.

And when he was gone Pauline loosened her hand from the shawl, shook her head sadly over it, kissed the thin ring finger where he had kissed it, and lay there look-

ing at it with the tears welling slowly in her eyes. But when he came again the tears were brushed aside and she had something more to tell him, something out of the store of news Gertrude had brought her of the child. A childish anecdote told a hundred times and still fresh, still a joy; some speculation about the exact shade of her curls, the exact region of her father's long length her whole height would reach to; a question about the papering of her nursery, the new furniture and the toys to be bought as soon as she was well enough to buy them.

Every night on her way to bed Everard carried her into first one and then the other of the two rooms where the paperer and whitewasher were already making preparation for the new little inmate of the house. They were Everard's old night and day nursery, and the bars that had been designed to save him from the perils of the window were still there in readiness to guard his daughter's recklessness; all his old possessions remained to be handed down to her.

On the first evening that he allowed Pauline to walk in leaning on his arm, instead of carrying her, they found that Mrs. Betteridge had almost restored the rooms to their old state, with the outcome of her talent for renovation, for polishing and rejuvenating, evident everywhere. "New carpets and new curtains," she had told Pauline, "and you won't want much else unless it's a few pictures and ornaments, and a fancy chair or the like—Master Everard being a boy, the place was always kept quite plain for him, and he such a rare one for tearing and smashing. But the most of it's as good or even better than you'd buy it nowadays." And

her words seemed as true in this instance as they generally were.

From the ostentatious brightness of the tall brass guard before each fireplace to the general smell of mingled soap, beeswax, and turpentine, it was all, Everard declared, just as he remembered it at the later end of "cleaning days," and before he had been allowed back to wreak his untidy will on it.

"The only thing that looks odd is the paper," he said. "I always had a blue paper; perhaps that's where my fancy for the color came from first. A light blue paper with blue and white dicky-birds with dashes of yellow about them; fierce looking fellows, I remember them well. I wonder what made you choose pink, Paulie? I'd have bet a sovereign any day you'd have the paper blue, and felt positive of winning."

"Oh, Everard, to remind me always, in my baby's rooms, of the color washed out of her father's eyes—her father's dear eyes that used to be so young and so blue, such boy's eyes, before the pain crept into them!" She looked at him with passionate intensity, all her soul in her face. "Not here, Everard! I couldn't have anything blue here to remind me of that. Do you know what I am hoping? That little Pauline's eyes are not her father's lost blue eyes—for how constantly that would serve to remind me, Everard! Oh, isn't it sad that I shouldn't know, that I can not be sure, even of the color of her eyes. Why have I never asked them that when I've asked so many, many questions? I suppose I thought I knew. For there was blue in them when I left her, only babies' eyes will change sometimes

and I don't know if she was too old for hers to change then or not."

Though he tried to soothe her he could not for a long time do it; when he laughed at her it was so half-heartedly that her tears easily served to drown his smiles.

"Oh, Everard, dear husband, it isn't childish," she said, "or if it is, I can not, can not help it. I don't want her to have blue eyes to make me always sorry. It's—it's only an outward sign, but it stands for so much—for all I've cost you, for all that your love for me has cost you. Don't you think I should be always wondering what would become of the blue in her eyes? Whether her love might not one day crush it out? Whether she, too, might not be called upon to go, like her father, through the bitter waters that wash the blue of youth away? It's only a sign, a fancy, darling, but I hope they're another color—it will hurt me so if they are not."

But that at least she was spared, for little Pauline's eyes were as brown as her own.

Although Everard had drifted almost without thought, almost heedlessly, into the great trouble of his life, it was yet characteristic of him to meet the minor ills, the daily worries and perplexities that fell to his share, a generous half-way. Over the home-coming of the little Pauline he spent much anxious thought, both on the child's account and on her mother's.

From all he could gather, the child was coming to them from an exceedingly happy home; from such loving care and companionship as in the very nature of

things she would be bound to fret after, for a time, at any rate, and what the effect would be on Pauline of the child's fretting he hardly dared to contemplate. That the very fever of love that burned in her for her little one might have the pitiful effect of turning that little one from her was the fear that haunted him perpetually, for he realized something of the way in which children are often instinctively repelled by nervous excitement, by unrest, in those who have the care of them; of how they cling to the calm, the undemonstrative, even at their best, their safest protectors.

How would Pauline bear it if her child's love was long in coming to her? if the best of it was first given with the waywardness of a childish fancy to some one else? As day by day he delayed the little Pauline's advent, he constantly asked himself these questions, tormented himself with these misgivings, and as constantly refused to face the answers prompted by his worst fears.

But Everard, after all, had only known Pauline as a girl wrapped about with the diffidence that is youth's chief charm; as a wife with her wifehood spoilt from the beginning. So far the thing Pauline was born to be she had missed, and he was yet to live with her as the mother of his child and learn her afresh. As he saw her wooing the little Pauline with a thousand tender arts into her rightful heritage in her heart and his own, as he was called upon from hour to hour to bear witness to her wonderful success, the thought of the three wasted years behind them rose up to accuse him, with a weight of evidence against him that was well-nigh more than he could bear.

XII

And for a time it seemed as if just as Everard's sense of the old wrong-doing became most vivid, most besetting, so Pauline's vigilant conscience was rocked at last into something like forgetfulness, into a tardy sleep. For the first three months, at any rate, of little Pauline's new life under her parents' roof the elder Pauline gave herself up wholly to the absorbing pleasure of her possession, to the delayed delight in her child, to a hitherto undiscovered joy in living.

She would not consent to have a nurse; during her illness another maid had temporarily been added to the household to set Mrs. Betteridge free to wait on her young mistress, and the girl's services were now permanently retained as an extra helper to make up for the extra inmate; that there might be some one to take the little Pauline out when her mother was obliged, by such social claims as still remained with her, to forego that pleasure. But the constant care of her child Pauline would not relinquish to any one; wherever she was the child was too, and the pretty nurseries prepared for her were only part of the little Pauline's new domain, which extended in fact to the whole of her father's rambling old house—from the kitchens upward at her own imperious pleasure.

Nowadays pattering footsteps, shrill baby laughter

echoed from early morning until evening in the somber rooms that all Everard's life had borne him down with an oppressive feeling of unwelcome quietude, of dulness, that he was powerless by himself to brush aside. He could hardly believe that one little maid, barely out of her babyhood, could do so readily, so instantaneously, the thing that had evaded him, baffled him completely and for so long; could fill with merry noise, with gaiety and fun the subdued and dim old house that had never been other than subdued, other than dim and colorless in his remembrance of it. And sometimes it seemed to him the very irony of fate that this gaiety that he had mistakenly thought to bring into his life with the girl he married, should come to him at last as the gift of the little daughter against whom he had himself, and for so long, shut the doors of his home and his heart alike.

For Everard had always been particularly fond of children. In the days when he had gone courting in boyish fashion to the little house at Balham, half his time and his thoughts had invariably been given, although he never suspected it, to the merry little sisters of the girl he went there ostensibly to see. And now that he had a child of his own, a child in every way as bewitching and gay as those other children, he fell a ready captive to her spell. His perplexities about his affairs, his resentment against life and his neighbors, his realization of the narrow brink on which he and the respectability of his name stood poised, his longing to keep Pauline always as she was now—almost as young and thoughtless as the child herself—the longing that he could not but believe to be futile, all his

many cares and anxieties, only fell from him in the odd moments he snatched from his work to throw himself eagerly into a wild, laughing romp with the laughing child, when he shared with her her playtime, making it his.

Just while little Pauline rushed at him in welcome, her small face alight, her busy tongue clamoring; while he tossed her in his arms to the chorus of her pealing laughter; while she dodged him round chairs and tables, a squealing, chubby temptress, or clung to him with the worship, the sweet kisses that know no fear, that have no after-taste; while he listened outside the door to her noisy wailing that never failed to follow his retreat; just while he snatched at these dear simple pleasures and held them fast, Everard Lomas was happier in his home life than he had ever been before.

It was rarely now that he shut the front door behind him without being called upon to wave his hand in return for the farewells showered after him by Baby Pauline, held up to see the last of him in the elder Pauline's arms. And that no man in New Town on going out left a prettier picture behind him he was keen enough to see.

The two curly heads pressed together, the mother's so youthfully charming, the child's so childishly sweet, the two faces so truly beautiful, so strikingly alike, where could he equal them as a sheer delight to the eyes, apart from their irresistible claim on his love? And yet from the acknowledgment of that beauty, the fatally compelling beauty of his wife and the equally fatal reproduction of it in his child, Everard Lomas

would turn away sick and hopeless to battle with the specter of his life—the specter of a reputation held up to open censure, to a merited blame.

Sometimes he would tell himself, as he had told himself once before—and that time with such disastrous results—that he was a nervous fool, that all would be right, that everything would still go on as it had gone on for so long; but the words were empty words, and they brought him no sense of stability, brought him only the most temporary relief. Sometimes he went as far as to count up the good things of his life one by one, a process far enough removed from his usual habits, and yet even in its novelty quite unconvincing beyond the moment. It was then that he would ask himself how many young men of his acquaintance, of his by no means unusual ability, were as well established as he was at his present age, that hardly reached to twenty-eight years? —then, that he would be forced into admitting that such outwardly fortunate young men were far to seek.

For he was living in one of the oldest and best houses in the town, and he could afford it; his income was fully sufficient for his material comfort and of those dependent on him, and he earned every penny of it. He had stepped from a year's holiday succeeding his studies straight into a position, into a practise which an older man might have envied, and he had proved himself qualified to retain the position; so far, as the result of his young enthusiasm for his work, he had even improved and extended the practise. In an overcrowded, competitive age, where too often the mere struggle to make a start in the difficult race for a livelihood saps and

renders useless a man's whole energies, Everard had a great deal surely to be thankful for in the clear start that had come to him as an inheritance, for the privilege of beginning practically at the very place where his father had left off. And Everard was thankful in his own fashion: at least he clung feverishly to his possessions, dreaded hourly the loss of any one of them.

But with the rest he had inherited a peculiarly vivid appreciation of an untarnished name—his father's sensitive spirit, without his father's spotless record or his father's true courage. In vain he counted himself lucky in a position which his own folly had rendered so insecure from the first; that circumstances had compelled him to further undermine. Every time he left the two Paulines at the window to enter a patient's house it was to wonder what that particular patient thought of his adoption of a child; whether "she" had her "suspicions," whether "he" was shrugging his shoulders over the doctor's latest "fad," while hoping his own wife would not inquire too inquisitively into the reasons for that shrug. When any one asked him after the child, it took all his wits to answer a simple question simply. The little tale he had arranged with himself to tell stuck in his throat from very nervousness, and an unuttered lie became a tragedy. Natural and friendly curiosity transformed itself into an impertinence, and his easily aroused irritability began to show where it had never shown itself before, in the presence of the sick and sorrowful, in the discharge of his daily duties, and at a time when a continuation of his old ease of conversation and manner, his ample and readily expressed sym-

pathies, would have served better than anything else to help him over a dangerous crisis in his career. That he should go about preoccupied and moody now seemed tantamount in his own mind to a confirmation of the scandals he suspected in connection with his name, and yet again and again the moods mastered him, time after time the preoccupation visibly held him in thrall.

Added to slights that may have been intended, he saw many that were purely imaginary. He lost a friend or two from his open resentment of what he chose to think they thought of him, and their inability to probe his thoughts to which their own gave no clue; he lost a patient or two from uncontrolled temper. People began to tell him he looked ill and overworked, and even that statement of an obvious fact roused in him, instead of gratitude for a well-meant evidence of concern, that "touchiness" for which, in Mrs. Betteridge's opinion, he had always been remarkable at home, if never abroad. And now at home he reverted to much of his old fidgetiness about his own health; for Pauline's ears he had a succession of small ailments, all the while he was almost rudely refusing to acknowledge anything wrong with him to every one else.

And then as the weeks slipped on into months, as the time lengthened, the thing he had foreseen must inevitably happen slowly but very surely came to pass. The shadows began to creep back again into Pauline's beautiful eyes, the chill shadow clutched again at her heart, and the present he had spoken of as the term of her satisfaction grew nearer and nearer to an end, as he knew it must.

She kept her brightness for the child. With admirable bravery she trained her voice to gaiety, her eyes and her sweet mouth to smiles for as long as the child was with her. But soon she ceased to have the child always with her; she began to find reasons why the maid should sometimes play with her, should more frequently take her out; she devoted a great deal of her time to her still, but not all her time, for there were seasons when the smiles would not come at her bidding, when the shadow would not be denied.

She did not say anything to Everard, while Everard ignored all change in her, at least in words, but the old misunderstanding was appreciably diminished between them, and, as we know, Everard had been waiting for this. And Pauline, who understood so much about him, probably knew that too.

Generally when Pauline spent an evening alone, as she spent so many of her evenings, Everard would come in to find her still industriously sewing at some garment for the child; she had found an occupation for her clever needle again, and little Pauline's clothes were a marvel of fine stitchery; for when she could not be playing with her darling, to work for her seemed ever her greatest solace. But one evening Everard came in earlier than usual to find her crouching down on the hearth-rug before the fire, her face very white, her wild, strained eyes fixed on the flames, her whole attitude one of abandonment to despair. She did not move or look up as he crossed the room.

Everard sat down close to her in his customary easy

chair. "Haven't you been working to-night, Paulie?" he asked, not knowing what to say, while impelled to say something.

"No, not to-night," she said.

"Why not?"

"I couldn't—to-night."

"Aren't you well, dear—or have you come to the end of your work?"

"I've plenty of work—only I daren't do it. I was afraid to do it. I—I am too ghost-ridden, Everard. I feel to-night as if I should never dare to touch her—or her things—bless her dear heart—again!" She gave a pitiful little laugh. "Are ghosts catching, do you think, Everard?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said drearily. "Sometimes I think they must be. I seem to have been suffering pretty badly from them of late."

He shivered as he sat leaning forward toward the fire, his eyes fixed, as hers were, on the flames. For some time neither of them spoke, although to both of them the silence was almost unbearable, alive, suffocating.

"Pauline," Everard burst out at last, "why couldn't you rest satisfied? It was just endurable while you were satisfied; it's getting unendurable now."

"But how could I?" she asked. "I had to give myself a little time—oh, I had to have a little time to enjoy her in! But even that I stole! Even that I had no right to!"

"Paulie—" he began; but she moved so that she was kneeling against him and went quickly on.

"You know it makes it worse in some ways, Everard,

having her here like this," she said. "We are taking all the enjoyment of her, but we are making no acknowledgment of our sin to—to wipe it out. At least while we denied ourselves the sight of her we were sacrificing that. Now we are sacrificing nothing. We are doing worse than we have ever done."

"Tell me," he asked suddenly, "how did the old Dad persuade you to give up the child, in the first instance? Do you know, you've never told me? Will you tell me now?"

"Like that," she said. "He told me he thought perhaps that was the punishment we should accept; that the parting from our child was meant to be our punishment. And I tried to believe it because—oh, Everard, I loved you so, and I wanted to believe anything that would make it possible for me to be with you."

He lifted her up into the shelter of his arms. "And you never did believe it?" he questioned.

"No," she whispered.

"Pauline," he cried passionately, "do you understand that there are moments when I'm glad to have had you—as I have had you, in spite of everything? when the very heart of my love seems centered on that?"

"Yes," she said. "For there are moments when I am glad to feel I gave myself to you simply because you loved me; when right and wrong are all the same to me —are lost in that."

"Then we have lived a few moments worth living!" he cried triumphantly.

"Ah, Everard, don't! We want to feel that life is worth living for the good, not the bad in us, surely? And

what are a few moments compared with the sum of our two lives? Where is the dear boy's face of my love? Where is our peace?" She paused a moment and went on again: "Everard, now you've got her you love our baby? Next to me you love her?"

"Next to you."

"And you could not bear to part with her?"

She was so close to him that the shudder that ran through him ran through her also.

"No—it would be awful."

"And yet you are not satisfied?"

"Paulie, you know."

"Yes, I know that you are not satisfied. Then why should you expect me to be satisfied alone? Are we so unlike? Are we not rather so alike after all, that one of us can never be satisfied without the other? Oh, Everard, I do believe there is no peace for us in all this beautiful world until we both feel we are doing right as far as it lies in our power."

"Paulie," he said hoarsely, brokenly, "it is no good. I can not do it."

Pauline looked up at him, looked long and eagerly into his eyes. He had never once said as much as that to her before out of his soul stripped bare of all pretense. She looked long into his eyes, but of what she saw there she found nothing to say.

She wound her arms closer about him.

"Dearest! dearest!" she whispered.

XIII

"SWEETHEART!" Everard called from the nursery door. "Come along then."

"Sweetheart's coming," little Pauline called back, "Sweetheart's really, really coming;" but she did not come, for with a swift, mischievous movement the elder Pauline had made a loop of her two arms about the little eagerly panting, struggling form.

"Why don't you hurry?" she kept asking teasingly. "What are you waiting for, silly one?" Before she would let go she had to be bribed with hurried kisses; one—two—three—the price of freedom for little Pauline was set at half a dozen and exacted to the uttermost.

The elder Pauline stood up again smiling and flushed as her captive bounded away from her to fling herself upon the tall form in the doorway; to drag Everard forcibly into the room.

"I couldn't help it really, really, darling," said little Pauline; and added, with reproving, roguish, backward glances, "She's a naughty auntie—she's jel—she kept me—she did really. Isn't she a naughty auntie then?"

"She is," Everard agreed. "And now she's turning sulky, look! She's beginning to work. People always work in a corner when they're sulky. Never mind; we'll do without her, won't we, Sweetheart, dear?"

"We'll do without a naughty sulky little auntie, won't

we, Sweetheart, dear?" chimed little Pauline after him, and began to whisper secrets to him, since secrets were always the crowning favor—long secrets, impossible to follow, but sweet to share, with her curls brushing his face, her warm lips close to his ear, her restless little arms half strangling him.

"You're uncommonly quiet, you two," said the elder Pauline, in her teasing voice. "You can not be enjoying yourselves so very much, I fancy. Is anybody going to cry, I wonder?"

Cry! Was there ever such a challenge! As she beguiled her big playmate into the noisy romping so dear to both of them, while the merry games progressed to a fever pitch of enjoyment, little Pauline could not forget such a slur as that cast upon their reputations. Cry! who would think of crying! Not little Pauline! Not her big sweetheart! Only, perhaps—with bewitching, roguish glances—only perhaps a sulky little auntie left in a corner right out of the game! She danced up to Pauline to drag at her hands hastily put up to hide her face. "Is you crying then, you bad little thing?" she asked. "Little Pauline is almost quite ashamed of auntie."

It had been Mrs. Betteridge's idea that the supposed adopted daughter should know her father and mother as "aunt" and "uncle." It would sound better, Mrs. Betteridge had considered, than the too suggestive titles of nearer kinship forever on the childish lips, and Everard, always glad to walk as circumspectly as possible, had agreed that it would be better, while Pauline had offered no objection; her eagerness to have the child

had covered everything else at the time; had left her utterly indifferent about trifles.

For Mrs. Betteridge had first learned the true story of her Master Everard's marriage at the time of Pauline's illness, and she had taken the revelation in a spirit of charity, of pity, and of wide understanding, that had made them both glad to follow her guidance when it was possible, for very gratitude. To Everard she had given all the mothering he remembered; her sharp eye for his faults had always been more than balanced by her unfailing regard for his wants, for his best interests as she saw them, and he had shrunk from her blame in this matter with an intensity that was only second to his shrinking from his father's blame long before, and he had been spared it as he had been spared the other.

"No—I can't say anything to you when your blessed father couldn't," she had said to him. "Who am I to speak hard to you if he didn't? And you needn't tell me that he didn't, for well I know it." She wiped her eyes unavailingly from the tears that would not be stayed. "God pity you, my dear, as I do, for this world's an ill place in which to take a fellow being by the hand and lead him out of the light into the darkness, if it's only once in a lifetime."

So it was that Mrs. Betteridge earned the control of the younger Pauline as well as of her father and her mother, even to arranging what that father and mother should be called by her.

The noisy game, the pretty fooling, went on that morning in the pink-papered nursery for longer than usual: Everard was having what he called a "slack

day," and Everard's slack days were red-letter days always in little Pauline's calendar. By and by, in the course of the romping, little Pauline's hair ribbon came off and the curls she considered so tiresome began to tumble into her eyes. The difficulty of catching even a big man with eyes obscured by unruly curls must be apparent to every one.

Little Pauline brought her ribbon to the natural tier-up of curls, to the "bad little auntie" supposed to be suffering from prolonged sulkiness. The provoking light still shone in auntie's eyes, she caught at the ribbon, she dangled it mischievously, wickedly, just out of reach of the chubby hands held up to reclaim it, but she would not tie up the curls. In vain the wheedling, the protests, the pretended violence of little Pauline, there was no moving this naughty auntie to-day.

"Never mind," Everard said to his sweetheart from the other side of the room. "What's this thing? A shoe-lace?—that'll do very well. A shoe-lace will look twice as grown-up as a silly ribbon. Even quite old ladies don't always get their hair tied up with shoe-laces. Come to father, pet. Father'll tie her hair up for her."

Pauline, his wife, looked swiftly across at him; above the child's head their eyes met in a startled, frightened gaze. The word that had slipped out so unexpectedly, so easily, served to turn Everard white; brought to a summary close the nursery game. He freed himself almost roughly from the child who had come to him at once; quite heedless of the name he had given himself, thinking only of being revenged on the naughty auntie; with desperate haste he fled from the room.

Things seemed suddenly to have gone wrong for little Pauline, how or where she could not discover. For although her auntie threw off the sulkiness that little Pauline knew to be only play, though she kissed her consolingly several times to make up for the disturbing flight of her big sweetheart, yet even she would not play any more, only took her down-stairs to Mrs. Betteridge —who never had time to play in the morning—and then disappeared, not to return for a long, long while.

Pauline went to find Everard, but she was only in time to hear the front door bang after him, and she did not see him again until he came in to snatch a hurried lunch. He sat down in moody silence, a silence that she knew from experience it would be useless for her to try to break. He hardly ate anything, and directly he got up from the table he told her he was going out and did not know when he should return.

"If you're wanted, Everard, where shall I send?" Pauline asked.

"I don't think I shall be wanted," he answered. "But if I am, you'll have to say you don't know where I am for once, or when I shall be in, or anything about me—if they don't like it they'll have to lump it. I certainly can't tell you where I shall be, because I don't know myself."

Pauline looked at him but did not answer. He went out of the door, only to come in again in a moment.

"You don't want me, do you, Paulie?"

"No, Everard, no. It's my At Home day, and I've asked a good many people as well—you know you told me to. I did think, perhaps, you'd be able to come in

for a little while and help me—hand cakes and make the thing go; but Gertrude is coming over if she can; she'll help me, and—and it would be too much for you to-day."

"Yes," he said, "I couldn't stand much to-day, Paulie—not a party of cackling old hens of all things. Just feel my hand," he ended, and held it out to her.

She took his hand in her own. "Darling, what a state of nerves you're in! Go out and walk it off. Everard, no one heard but me. Even little Pauline never noticed, and she would only have thought it a new play if she had."

"But if I begin these fool's tricks, how do I know where they will end?" he asked. "My nerves are getting a perfect curse—the slightest thing throws me into a fever. Yes, I'll go——"

And he went, to leave Pauline staring wide-eyed after him with a fixed, strained gaze that yet saw nothing.

She stood there by the window so long that Mrs. Betteridge had to remind her that she must get dressed for the party; had to hurry her up-stairs and help her change her frock, and even then only had her ready as the first caller arrived.

"I don't know which is the biggest baby in this house, I'm sure," Mrs. Betteridge said, with privileged familiarity. "Sometimes I feel as if I could shake the lot of you."

As Everard said, he could not tell any one where he was going, because he did not know himself. He hardly realized his own intentions when he got into the Epsom

train; as a man in a dream he turned in the direction of the Downs; he crossed them still brooding, still dreaming. When he faced the great white Stand, when he paused before it, he could not have told what had brought him to it; why he was there rather than anywhere else.

It was springtime now, not late summer as that time when he and Pauline had lingered there together, but the day was warm and bright, and the place did not look very different from when he saw it then—he had never been there since. If anything, in the keener sunshine of the spring, surrounded by fresher, crisper greenery, the great white painted erection stood out more gaily, more impudently than of old; if anything, there was more of open mockery, less of undefinable mystery in its air. Almost on the spot where he and Pauline had rested, Everard threw himself down upon the grass. But he did not look up at it to wonder now.

He was no longer curious: he had seen life, he had felt its sting, its bitterness; was himself a victim of its inconsistency. And he had proved that he had not the courage of which the great white Stand forms so meet an emblem—the courage that is gay and self-sufficient, that covers the grave of a thousand hopes with an impudence that lets out nothing, that mocks at the power of life in the face of the living.

Everard lay very still; his cheek to the green grass, the fresh keen air blowing over him. His thoughts went up and down, and round and round; he had lost control of his thoughts; he could not have told you of what he was thinking. To himself he seemed to be waiting, wait-

ing, but he could not have told you what he was waiting for; hardly what he wanted, except that it had escaped him long ago on the way from which there is no returning.

He lay so still as though he dare not move; as though he had lost the power of movement, given his will up of his own accord but past reclaiming. He lay so still he might have been one dead; even to himself he might have been one dead but for the restless thoughts that had no sequence, no meaning; the singing in his head of useless, empty thoughts that would not be dumb, would not be quieted.

When at last he dragged himself stiffly to his feet the mists had risen. And once more, wrapped about in them, the Stand, so lately brave, so lately gay, looked shadowy and sinister, a thing of evil omen.

XIV

Besides the invited guests, an unusual number of callers came to Pauline's At Home that afternoon, and the room was soon quite full of the socially important, the in any way prominent ladies of New Town. Nearly every one knew every one else, a circumstance always tending to ease of manners, to wealth of conversation, and the unmistakable air the occasion presented of *being* an occasion kept them lingering over their gossip and their teacups beyond the limit generally imposed on formal calling. For festivities of any sort were as eagerly seized upon in New Town as they are in most towns, big or little, near or far.

From the time of his wife's death until the time of his son's marriage the drawing-room had hardly been entered at all by old Dr. Lomas, but he had had it very thoroughly redecorated for Pauline; with her constant use it had grown warm again, grown homely, and it was a pretty airy room, the prettier because most of its furnishing dated back into the old doctor's own youth, while everything in it, chairs, tables, and ornaments alike bore evidence to the tireless polishing, the spotless cleanliness that Mrs. Betteridge ungrudgingly devoted a life to maintain in her vicinity. And to-day Pauline had lavishly arranged the flowers wherever flowers would

go; to-day Pauline herself had a new frock in which to do the honors, and Mrs. Betteridge had seen to it that the two maids who helped with the tea were as trim and smart as the tea and the cakes were daintily plentiful; a prosperous, well-to-do air pervaded the young doctor's home that his young wife's guests could hardly be blind to.

But Pauline found it very hard to rouse herself from the mood into which Everard had impelled her. She moved about, talking to one and another; she did her utmost to be entertained, to be entertaining, but all the while the people around her seemed nearly as far away as her own far-away interests; all sorts of strange fancies held themselves in her mind in front of her spoken words and the words of others, ready to trip her up; strange, fantastic fears of falling, of knocking things over, constantly beset her. More vividly present to her than any face there was Everard's white drawn face as she had seen it last; nothing in her surroundings was as real to her as the throbbing of Everard's nerves, seeming to run up her arm, to tingle all through her body, as she held his hand in hers—if she had been still holding it the sensation could not have been keener: above the clatter of teacups, the buzz and hum of many raised feminine voices, was Everard's low voice, broken and pained, forever in her ears.

And with it all she was genuinely vexed at the small justice she felt she was doing herself; at the reflected discredit she considered she was bringing on Everard. These people and the friends and relations of these people were his patients, the sources from whence he drew

his income, the capricious fates of his career as a medical man, and therefore worthy of propitiation by his wife: for the sake of her hard-working husband she would have liked to do her small part as well as it could be done; would have liked to feel herself as great a success as a hostess as he proved himself successful professionally.

Yet Pauline's abstraction, if only she would have believed it, was far more noticeable to herself than it was to any one else; those alone who knew her best would have detected the effort she was making; perhaps not even they would have seen anything wrong with her, beguiled by the beauty of her face, to which excitement and effort had added alluring last touches. And then, even at her worst, Pauline's manners had the ready grace, the unconscious charm that all the Ayres girls inherited from their popular and charming father—a charm that was not easily rivaled.

While for the still greater prosperity of the party there was Gertrude—certainly a little late, but not too late for usefulness. Gertrude's acquaintance among the good ladies of New Town was not extensive, but that was a very small matter to her, and then Gertrude's airy self-confidence, her ringing laughter, there could be no better element for the promotion of good-will and gaiety anywhere.

Everything, indeed, seemed going so well that Pauline began to lose a little of the overpowering sensation of throbbing nerves in her arm, of nameless apprehension about her heart. Even when somebody asked to see little Pauline, asked if she wasn't coming in to be pre-

sented, she gained at any rate no conscious accession of nervousness. As a matter of fact, it was Gertrude who broke off—for half a second—in the spirited recital of an amusing anecdote, who looked sharply up at the speaker.

Mrs. Betteridge had an old-established theory of her own with regard to emergencies, that if they were likely to prove disturbing, they were well worth providing against. Thus if she particularly wished for fine weather she went out armed with an umbrella; even in goloshes and a rain-cloak on dry but extreme occasions. To-day she had amassed for herself quite a number of reasons why little Pauline was safest kept out of the drawing-room; she had not given any of the reasons to Pauline the elder, but that was because she was not asked for them and had other discreet theories concerning the letting well alone; because when she said as a feeler, "Well, I'll see that the little maid is happy this afternoon, then," Pauline, abstracted and visibly distressed in mind, had said, "Thank you, Mrs. Betteridge; that will be sweet of you," and no more.

But just in case little Pauline should after all be sent for to the drawing-room, and to prevent its happening, if possible, Mrs. Betteridge had put the child into her best white frock, into her best blue shoes and blue silk socks, had put a blue ribbon into her bright curls—for Everard would not be wholly denied his favorite color on his child—had made, as she said, a little picture of her fit to soften any womanly heart.

So it was that little Pauline came in almost immediately on being summoned, dainty and fresh from Mrs.

Betteridge's hands. Gertrude looked at her swiftly, to be relieved of at least one of her anxieties—there was nothing unprepared about little Pauline to cast a slur on her mother's party, and Gertrude shared Mrs. Betteridge's dislike of being taken at a disadvantage for want of some trifling forethought. Pauline, who had spent hours making the little dress, who had given a fund of loving consideration to the choice of the little shoes and socks, never noticed if the child had them on or not; she was only intent at setting her quickly at ease, if she needed it.

But little Pauline needed nothing of the kind. She paused at the elder Pauline's side, smiling up at her, but with no more bidding than an answering smile she passed on, a gracious, self-possessed little figure, to the many strange ladies waiting to greet her. She went from one to the other holding her sweet little face up to be kissed, readily answering all questions in her bright, childish treble, and not in the least embarrassed to find herself the center of so much adult attention, the object of so many outspoken remarks. She was not in the least shy, but she was not at all forward, either—just gay and sweet and herself, innocent enough and pretty enough, one would have thought with Mrs. Betteridge, to melt any womanly heart, not only on her own account, but on account of all belonging to her—if hearts were always hearts in the natural state, not organs inflated with unearned pride, drugged into unwholesome sleep with curiosity.

All the good ladies there—the good ladies of New Town—were thoroughly familiar with the sight of little

Pauline out-of-doors in her perambulator or on foot, or even perched up at Everard's side as he drove swiftly along in his red-wheeled cart on the errands they and their belongings devised for him. But until now there had been nothing amounting to a formal presentation of the Doctor's adopted child to his kind supporters and friends. With his father's death and his wife's severe illness, not far removed in the matter of months, entertaining had not been expected of him lately, and those who had recently called on Pauline had just missed or in some way failed to see the child, Mrs. Betteridge being always on the spot to work her spells of prevention that had not played her false until to-day.

But now that an opportunity of closer scrutiny had arisen they took ample advantage of it. The conversation was no longer broken up among twos and threes, there were no longer any separate centers of interest; whoever spoke to or of little Pauline held the general attention, and everybody else leaned forward watching and listening eagerly. Gertrude was as powerless to break up the groups as an insignificant, shy school-girl might have been; Gertrude, for all her undoubted social gifts, for all the rage consuming her, could do nothing. As for Pauline, she seemed left outside the circle that had formed round the child to dissect and to appraise her—left outside the consideration of her guests until it occurred to one of them to appraise her, too, to hold her up for inspection and see where she was wanting.

It was an extremely stout, gray-haired lady with a reputation for scandal-mongering and outspokenness, which she disguised for the unwary with the pleasantest

of voices, who was the first to go so far in the way of personalities as to express her doubts of the wisdom of adopting a child under any circumstances whatever.

"Well, now," she said, "I hope it will answer, I'm sure, and I shall be as sorry as any one if it doesn't, but I've known it done before, and I've never known it succeed." She recited some graphic instances where it certainly could not be said to have succeeded—on her evidence, at any rate—and she looked at Pauline as if she expected her to applaud at the least. "Yes," she ended, "I'm sure I hope it may answer in your case," and fell into silence with a convenient hush to give weight to her hopes and their lack of hopeful emphasis. Then again she looked at Pauline, a peculiarly meaning look, of which no one could escape the significance who prided themselves on any quickness of perception at all, a look which at once made something quite apparent that strangely enough seemed to have escaped the sharp eyes of the ladies of New Town so far.

Pauline was standing at the moment. Her new dress was of a soft, silky black material, and from her shoulders it fell in straight, thick folds to her feet. She was standing quite still, a little apart, a little sideways; her figure was rather clearly defined in spite of the soft black folds that wrapped it about, and the attention of the room had been fixed by a look upon her figure.

"Well, my dear," the last speaker continued, not only looking at her, but pointedly addressing her as well, "you're very sly, you know, but I suppose such things as being a little beforehand—*previous,* I think you young folk call it—will occur now and again. I've

never found it worth while to go out of my way to court responsibilities myself, for Nature generally sees to it we've as much of that sort of thing as we are fitted to manage, but young folk will be young, and Youth's only another name for impatience. You'll be called upon to put up with a few jokes, I'm afraid, at your expense, on account of this pretty mite, but you won't think much of that when the little stranger has arrived to make a stranger of some one else. For, say what you will, blood is thicker than water, though I'm sure I hope it won't make much difference here."

Pauline's troubled face, her eyes, darkened with distress, drew what pity there was in the assembly toward her. She had no thought of saying anything, but to save her the necessity several well-meaning women made hurried and badly aimed remarks, while the wide, gray-haired lady smiled serenely on. The most distinct of these remarks was addressed to little Pauline in the form of a question.

"And what is your name, my little dear?"

"Little Pauline," the child answered in her clear treble, so easily heard by every one.

Everard had tried to teach her to answer to his pet name for her, "Sweetheart," but in vain. "That's my little name and your little name, but not for every peoples," she would say, with a touch of her mother's quiet obstinacy that could be so sweet, that could be so provoking.

"Little Pauline," she answered now as ever.

"Well, now, if that isn't a strange coincidence!" said the wide, gray-haired lady. "But perhaps your new

auntie and uncle gave you that name because they're fond of it? Perhaps you used to be called by another name?"

"Peoples always call me little Pauline except my Sweetheart Uncle," little Pauline maintained with polite firmness. "It is my always name."

Truly a coincidence of the strangest, as every one agreed. The gray-haired chief speaker looked knowingly again at her hostess.

"You're not only sly, you're clever, my dear," she said. "Now if I had adopted a child I should never have hit on one with my own name—no, I never was a good hand at matching anything, and my name's a commoner one than yours, or used to be; my name's Eliza."

During the laugh that so seldom failed this lady's ponderous attempts at wit, during the stray comments that followed, little Pauline set herself free from the position of public entertainer and bounded to the elder Pauline, now seated, but still a little apart, a little divided from the big group of interested visitors. Instinctively Pauline held out her arms, instinctively the child clambered on to her lap, put her arms round her neck, and turned her little face in the direction of her face. And so were the two curly heads pressed together, the two faces so identical in exquisite coloring and shape set cheek to cheek before the gaze of the elect of New Town.

In the brown eyes of Pauline the elder—Pauline a mystic, a dreamer of dreams—was the look partly wild, wholly pathetic, that told of a soul stirred to its depths, of a body a prey to overwrought, painfully vibrating nerves. Her arms were folded about the little form pressed close to her, they served to close in the child so

susceptible to the moods of those she clung to for either physical or mental support, as all young children are, and into the brown baby eyes of Pauline the younger crept the answering look of trouble, of unreasoning fear, to complete the likeness.

"Upon my word," said the pleasant-voiced chief spokeswoman, speaking for once from sheer surprise and without special intent, "if they're not the image of each other! I've always said it was clever of you to pick out a child so like yourself, curls and everything; but—why, if it isn't a miracle!"

"Well—if it isn't strange——"

"Eyes and all, and you've really such remarkable eyes."

"Just like——"

"Well, it does seem as if they were made for each other——"

"She couldn't be more like you if she was your own child!"

Pauline stood up. Gertrude stepped hastily forward, but should Gertrude precipitate disaster? What, in any case, could Gertrude do? Pauline stood up, at bay before her thoughtless tormentors, but arraigned in her own soul before a greater Judge. Little Pauline was in her arms, still clinging to her.

"She is my child—our child," she said, in her clear penetrating voice. "That is why she is so like me."

XV

Even Gertrude could never distinctly recall any details of what happened directly after, for the impression left by that heavily charged moment of Pauline's confession served to effectually wipe out the closing scene of the party. The good ladies of New Town, those who had harbored "suspicions" and those who simply "never thought," were alike overcome by the result of their unheeding tactlessness, their vaguely malicious intent. They were shocked, but for the most part they were more deeply shocked at Pauline's present words even than at the story of the past she thus confirmed; they felt that they had some right they could not have defined to the truth in this matter, but they also felt that no woman had the right to force the whole truth on them at a single blow like that. If she couldn't keep the sinful secret any longer, if she wanted to confess, they said, modestly ignoring their part in the afternoon's performance, she ought to have chosen a clergyman to open her heart to first, and then——

It was all very grievous, they said, and no longer to be surprised at that they had always felt something strange about her; no longer surprising that young Dr. Lomas looked thin and worried and so different to his poor father. Those who had daughters began to grow almost alarmed when they thought of how often Everard visited

their houses; those now under his treatment began to wonder if he did after all understand their constitutions? if those pills were really suiting them? if it wasn't a milder treatment they wanted? Wondered if the rival doctor was as thick-headed and as little a gentleman as people said? if dropped h's did interfere with a man's merit? if his pills and his potions might not—h's or no h's—be milder? might not at any rate be safer, all things considered?

It was something to do to piece the tale together out of the facts so well preserved in the memories of every one, but some satisfaction had to be discounted from that by the blow thus cast on the respectability of the community of which they formed a part, added to that old fear of what the world is coming to next. They no longer speculated—as they had grown used to speculating—over the hurried quietness of Everard's marriage, over the fact that old Dr. Lomas had drooped and failed just when he seemed to have least cause for drooping and failing; they saw nothing strange any more in the tragedy that had stared at them from a bride's fair face, but they felt that the completed story was no story for their young people, and although they didn't in the least care for stories suitable for young people, they virtuously made a point of resenting all that were not. Because they were women, and because pity is cheap, pity was not wanting now. Yet it must be admitted that the greater part of it fell on the wrong places.

Humphrey Martin had an old habit of "running down," as he called it, to dine with the Lomases without

warning, and just whenever the opportunity came to him. It was a custom dating back into Everard's boyhood; one that if he did not particularly appreciate, he would certainly have missed. And although these visits had lost the best of their charm for Martin himself with his old friend's death, he still made them as frequently as ever, chiefly because he could not tear himself away from his strong interest in those his old friend had loved. With his passion for being of use he often found reason to be glad of having paid one of these impromptu visits on the night of his paying it, but he was nevermore glad not to have let a chance of going slip than he was the night after Pauline's party. And yet not after all for the sake of Pauline or of Everard, or from regard for the old Doctor's memory, but for his own sake and Gertrude's.

Everard had not returned when Humphrey Martin, quite early in the evening, reached the familiar house. Mrs. Betteridge, opening the door herself to his well-known knock, told him part of the events of the afternoon; but she could not tell him all—not even all she knew—since tears and trouble made her nearly incoherent. Gertrude told him a little more, but Pauline's presence made it extremely little; and Pauline, sitting on the sofa under the window, very white and very still, told him nothing at all—in words. But Humphrey Martin, as we know, was not as dependent as most people on the spoken word for his enlightenment.

And looking at Pauline he judged her attitude for what it was, the attitude of one listening intently, listening eagerly, with every sense subservient to the one sense, so that she hardly knew, of the things passing around

her, so much as that Gertrude was in the room, because the one she waited for, listened for, was not there. More than that he foresaw—how when that one came for whom she was waiting, she would be so lost to everything outside his presence that she would be oblivious for the time that such a person as Gertrude existed; saw that she was indeed beyond Gertrude's reach to be moved or helped in any way.

He took the only useful course he could take—he took Gertrude home. She needed some persuading before she would go, but he managed the persuading. If it had needed force he felt that he was equal even to that; it hurt him so terribly to see Gertrude standing there, torn with passionate longing to help the dearly loved sister to whom her help was of no possible use, that he put all his energies of mind into getting her away, and his energies did not fail him. Gertrude never quite remembered how it came about; it was another of the things dimmed by that day's more prominent events in her usually clear memory.

But Humphrey Martin, when, with the journey over, they were alone together in the pleasant, shabby sitting-room of the little house at Balham, had other things to tell her—things that he could tell her—gathered while he looked at Pauline's face; the intent set face that alone gave the clue to her feelings denied by her silent tongue. For he had judged, judging rightly, that with all the pain and trouble written on her face there was yet no fear to be read there—at least of Everard himself. Fear of paining him perhaps, distress at the thought of his distress; but of Everard as a man, of his possible anger,

possible violence, either of words or of actions, no trace of fear at all. And then another thing he had deduced from her listening attitude—that it was because she was so anxious to be herself the one to greet him, the one to tell him all that must be told, that she was straining every sense for the first sound of Everard's coming; because she believed that so the blow would fall easiest upon him, and that for the moment she cared for nothing in the world but to ease for him the inevitable blow as much as lay within her power. Humphrey Martin had seen a good deal of Everard during his wife's illness; he had learned a good deal from his self-contained silence; he had understood the feelings that had prompted him to do every possible thing for his wife himself, and to do it alone and unaided. Judging from what he had seen then and other things, he believed Pauline right in her belief that all the help that could be given to him now must be given by herself, not only for the good of the moment, but for the good of their whole future as well.

All this, and much more than this, he told to Gertrude that evening in the shabby sitting-room, among Bella's paints and brushes and the twins' scattered school-books; among traces of Gertrude's sewing and Gertrude's neat piles of account books and housewifely trifles; among all the girlish litter forever accumulating there, and allowed by Gertrude with the excuse to strangers that it kept the rest of the house so tidy; with the simple excuse to her own heart that "the others" liked it.

Humphrey Martin had not often been allowed there before; he had practically forced himself in to-night. His keen eyes took all the details of the room in as he talked,

and a feeling of refreshment, of comfort, settled about him which Gertrude might have found it hard to understand as the outcome of a tumbled room she spoke of herself, at heated moments, as her principal "thorn in the flesh." He looked at his cuffs rather wistfully. He was almost—but not quite—tempted to take them off.

For among the many other things he did not fail to observe, the newspaper crumpled up on the aged but inviting arm-chair, drawn close to the fire; the trodden-down slippers peeping from under it; the array of pipes among the twins' menagerie of china animals upon the mantelpiece—he knew the animals; the most expensive of them he had bought himself. He took a pipe up and looked at it idly while he talked.

"Heavens above us!" he broke off to say, "your father is a wonderful man to keep his pipes like this! Clean as a new pin, as I'm a sinner!"

"He doesn't," Gertrude said. "He wouldn't clean them out from year's end to year's end; the most he'd ever do would be to poke at them with a penknife. I clean them, of course. It would drive me silly to see him forever poking at them."

"How often do you clean them?" Humphrey Martin asked in almost awestruck tones.

"Every week."

"Some men have all the luck!" he complained. "Why is it?"

But Gertrude would not answer him.

Then it was that a sudden determination came upon him that she should answer him many things that he had waited too long to have answered, and that she should

do it to-night. "I never dreamed of such a state of luxury as that," he told himself with his one-sided smile. "But now I know such things can be I'll have my pipes cleaned for me every week—if I die for it!"

But he was too wise to aim straightly for the end he had set himself to reach. He neared it gradually—with each step a little nearer—but his steps took him for the present round and round the affairs of Pauline and Everard; especially about Pauline, at whose side her sister still clung in spirit. It was a long way round, but his blood was up and he was not afraid. Gertrude had need of him: although she was not considering her own needs he was, and they swept all other considerations from his mind. More than that, he had never in his life had a consideration that he wouldn't gladly have swept aside for Gertrude.

Mr. Ayres was out, as he usually was. Even now it was not at all late, and Bella was at a distant art class still, again a constant occurrence. His allies, the twins, were spending the evening with some school friends, and he knew that if they came in to interrupt him they would be discreet enough to disappear again, and that Gertrude would not be able to prevent their going.

"I've a fair field," he told himself, "and for this once I'm going to have my own way, Gertrude, but in return I'll give you the rest of our lives to do what you like in."

XVI

"STARTING from the most material, the wost worldly basis," Humphrey Martin said, "I do not think that even for Everard's sake this disclosure is to be regretted by those who have his best interests at heart."

"I believe he will feel it dreadfully," Gertrude said. "I don't know how he will be able to bear it. I have never been, as you know, very fond of Everard, but I do feel for him most thoroughly in this. I do not know, indeed, how he will bear it."

"I should say," Martin said, "that he'll bear the reality a great deal better than the thought of it beforehand. Unless I'm much mistaken Everard has been a constant prey to anticipations of this event—not in this form, perhaps, but with the identical effect—for many months past, ever since your sister's illness at any rate. That he has been suffering quite as much as he is capable of suffering, that he was getting pretty well to the end of his tether in that line, and that at least he'll abstract some relief from openly facing his fate at last. After all it has been a poor part for my old friend's son to play, to creep through life in an unspotted garment that didn't belong to him, lent to him at the price of a silence he couldn't enforce. That isn't the way to keep the world sweet and clean for the next generation, Ger-

trude, to cover our weak places out of sight—in the darkness where diseases spread, and spread to God knows what unsightly sores, only to come to light, festering and hideous past all healing, at the last. Better risk the swept-up petticoats of Mrs. Grundy for the sake of God's fresh air blowing into our hearts and minds and purifying the corners and waste places. We sometimes need to be disinfected, Gertrude, morally as well as physically, and sackcloth and ashes make a very good moral disinfectant—they make the only one that will count, I think. You, who love your sister so dearly, ought not to grudge her her sackcloth and ashes when there are so few among us with the strength to wear them."

He paused a moment with only the silence to answer him, and then went on. His strong face was lined and pained, for he would sooner have cut off his capable right hand than hurt Gertrude with a word, if by the loss of a hand, if with any pain for himself alone, he could have helped her.

"You have loved your sister, Gertrude," he said, "long and tenderly, but you have never loved her as well as you might have loved her, because you've been blind to the best of her, after all. Awake to all that is gentle and clinging and sweet—all that is outwardly dependent in her—the dependence that flattered you—but blind to the strength underneath, the strength that did not flatter you because it is so much greater than your own. Your sister has a beautiful nature—ah, yes, dear, beautiful, because one fall without a following does not make a sinner in the sight of Heaven, any more than one swallow makes a summer for us here—but her chief beauties are not

those you have recognized most. Look at her afresh, Gertrude, read her with my eyes, dear, and let me help you. Do you not see that there are few among us who are willing, as she is willing, to set one man before the whole world and everything in it, save only the good of his child, and her God before that man—the soul of the man before the man's body while loving his body too with no mean love? Tell me, if Everard had been without stick or stone of his own, if to follow him she must have gone out barefooted into the wilderness, don't you think she would have done it?"

"I think she would."

"I am sure of it! Gertrude, those are the women we men want, and yet when they are so rare you would have one of them spoil her destiny and the destiny of the man she's bound to, bowing the knee to a false god—to Mrs. Grundy! You would let all her powers be wasted in trying to conceal an old fault; in what after all only amounts to a pretense at concealment, for how much was it hidden? Hasn't this afternoon's work convinced you of the little use there is in trying to hide anything in this most inquisitive of worlds? I tell you, Gertrude, this world would be less given up to futile curiosity, would be a better place; men stronger and truer to themselves, if more of them had women at their sides with your sister's strength to guide them into the right way, if only as the unexpected outcome of a fall. When women go out into the world and do its work they are hindering and not helping. We men are capable of doing all the world's work that can be done; we were made for it, and because we were made for it we can do it best. But even a capable

workman isn't a complete being—he needs a woman to help him, and there are a hundred things about him that want her constant attention and care to keep him going in the right direction. The woman who will set herself faithfully to tend one man's soul is doing more for the world's work than if she were given a dozen lives to spend digging and delving with her own hands at the ground she wants cleared, or the building she wants erected." He waited with his slow smile mounting to his eyes.

"Mind—a man's *soul,* I say, Gertrude. I am not considering the woman who thinks she has done her whole duty toward him, if she takes her man to church once on Sunday and 'feeds the brute' during the week."

"Men want feeding," Gertrude said, speaking very slowly.

"They like being fed—oh, yes! we like it sure enough, Gertrude, but we could manage that very well for ourselves if needs were, and it isn't the vital matter it has grown to appear. We want other help more. We can cook and scrub, aye and dust too, when there's no woman about to do it for us, but we can't always pick ourselves up when we've fallen—it doesn't somehow always seem worth while unless a woman will help us. A hand to hold, a smile to win, a thank God for and with you—men are willing to fight the world, to fight themselves, if women will give them that. And instead you would have a woman you love leave the man she loves—and she at his side—cringing all their lives in the dust; going always on their hands and knees, praying for mere barren silence; praying for the pity of the world—which is a myth, Gertrude, which doesn't exist—when they might go

straight to the Fountain Head, when they might seek and gain the pity and forgiveness of God, which is everywhere and for every one—or what is the use of your God, Gertrude?—and having offered their gift, their atonement, get up from their knees and show the worth of their repentance with every day of their lives."

In the silence Gertrude rose hastily to her feet; her face was troubled, her eyes downcast, her hands clenched at her sides.

"Gertrude," Humphrey Martin said, "if you had a little child to deal with what would you do, a little child who had been naughty? Wouldn't you bid it come to you and say it was sorry first before you set it on your knee to kiss its tears away and promise it chocolates?—the kisses anyhow—the chocolates if you weren't afraid of making it sick."

"Yes—I suppose so."

"God is God, Gertrude. In whatever fashion we worship Him the difference only affects ourselves and not Him; He is always great and good, and the same. But if you, who can see such a little way, wouldn't think it wise to forgive a child an unacknowledged sin, why should you impute such shortsightedness to God?"

Gertrude raised her eyes to his, eyes that were no longer fearless and unashamed, and Humphrey Martin turned his own away.

"Let us get back," he said, "to that material basis from which we've strayed so far. I wanted to tell you that I can't, for one, deplore this disclosure on Everard's account, because I think he's practically wasted where he is as a medical man of considerable promise. I like

Everard nowadays a good deal better than I used to like him, but I believe I never denied him the possession of a certain quantity of brains. Circumstances kept him hard at his work at a critical period of his development, and the brains have come on beyond my expectations—perhaps there were always more of them than I saw. Of course they'll have to leave New Town—sell that practise and start afresh—the good townspeople would see to his being forced to leave if he didn't forestall them by going now. And Everard is worth something better than to start forth in life shod in a dead man's shoes—I shall be glad to see him beginning again, and beginning with nothing out of the past to rely upon. Do you remember his saying that even his rival there was a noodle? That wasn't bounce, or a wrong estimate, but the simple truth. I'm going to have a hand in the choice of Everard's new practise, and I'll see to it he has no more noodles to walk over; I'm going to have a handicapping hand and back him to win for all that. He's done most uncommonly well, but he couldn't have kept up his interest to a healthful pitch much longer there—I don't know how he's managed it so long, considering his ability for better work."

"I thought," Gertrude said, "that you had more to do with their settling there than any one else—that you advised the giving up of the child; planned it in the first place."

"I did," he owned. "And I think even now sometimes that perhaps I didn't err wholly, though I have been troubled with many doubts over it, as I believe my dear old friend was troubled too. For how can I tell how much my judgment was warped with regard for him

and the lightening of his last years? But at any rate Everard had not lived with Pauline's hand in his then—to learn of her because of his love for her. One does not know if he was worthy then of what I believe he's fit for now—a new beginning. And then there's Pauline with her faith in herself justified now that was untried then. I don't know," he ended, "it's hard to say. I may have been wrong—I often fear so—one lives and learns——"

"My voice is only the voice of a man himself in the wilderness, Gertrude," he said again. "I need help myself—and only I myself know how much until you come into my life to find out where I fail, and help me to kneel down where I should; help me to get up and go on again."

"I?" said Gertrude; "*I* help you? When you've shown me to-night my own uselessness?"

"You," he said, "and you only. Dear, I have shown you a lost power, or perhaps a power you never had, but here, waiting for you in my heart, is a power much greater than that could be. What can a woman do for another woman whose face is set ever toward a man? What have you had but the back of Pauline since Everard first stepped into her life? But you can have the whole of me, body and soul. You were made for a man; you were never made for any other reason. Aren't you going to take me for the man?"

"I suppose so."

From his stand upon the hearth-rug he gave a half-step toward her. But he drew himself up, squaring his wide shoulders, and would not let himself go.

"Because you love me?"

"I suppose so."

He clenched his hands behind his back so that the knuckles shone white through the firm flesh.

"Gertrude," he said, "you who have thought it no shame to give the devotion of your life for a few stray caresses, a few soft words, a thought here and there; you who can talk so graciously to any stranger that they can not even realize themselves a stranger while you're near; you who wouldn't dismiss a beggar without a smile to sweeten his crust for him, aren't you going to give me anything better than that by which to remember the best hour of my life?"

She came to him, put her hands upon his shoulders, but she did not look into his face. His hands twitched convulsively behind his back, yet he would not stir.

"I will marry you, Humphrey," she said, "because you've shown me my own proud rebellious heart, though it hurt you to do it; because you've shown me at the same time my need of some one stronger and better than myself to guide me—my need of you. I will marry you, Humphrey, because I find I love you and want you—no," she said, and lifted her eyes to him, "because I find I've always loved and wanted you only—only I wouldn't own it even to myself."

Still with his hands behind his back, he looked down into her eyes. The tale of his own love had been told a hundred times. This was his hour, and he had waited long for it.

"I love you because you're so strong, Humphrey—the strongest man I know; because, since I am weak, I must have some one strong to lean against—I must have you.

Because you do useful work, and do it well; because you are brave enough to be yourself, and speak the truth, and own yourself wrong—even when you aren't wrong at all!"

She pulled his hands forward from behind his back. While he looked down on her, and would not move a muscle in all his straining, eager, powerful body, she pulled his cuffs on their elastic suspenders over his wrists, and set to work to unfasten the little clips that held them in place. Although she had never touched them before, the best method of working them had frequently been explained to her. Her actions were always purposeful and sure, and he could not have done it more neatly himself, with all his practise.

When she had them off, she flung the cuffs one by one upon the table behind her, and then she stooped and kissed his strong, bare wrists—first the right and then the left, and then the right again.

"This poor fellow will be jealous," Humphrey Martin said, so she kissed the left wrist a second time also.

"I love you, Humphrey," she said, with uplifted head, with brave, true eyes that did not flinch, "because to me you seem the best man in the world, and such a foolish darling in spite of it!"

"Give me your lips!" he cried, as his arms went round her.

Humphrey Martin was not a man who ever had long at a time to give to any one, not even to Gertrude. Very soon he had to be on his way home again, with his leisure already stretched to unwonted lengths. Racing along the

road, in wholesome fear of "catching it from Ger," came Bee and Babs toward him.

"You!" they cried. "Well, have you been putting her into a good temper? Has she been fancying us taken suddenly ill, or run over, or anything? Because if she has, she's bound to be rather cross. What is she going to say to us for being so late?"

"I don't think she has been noticing the time," he said, and added: "Congratulate me, little sisters—Gertrude has given in at last."

"Has she?" they cried. "Really, has she? Oh, we're glad—quite a great deal glad and only a little tiny wee bit sorry—for ourselves, you know. Oh, aren't you feeling perfectly beautiful? Aren't you feeling splendid?" They dragged him under a street lamp. "Do let us look at you," they cried. "Please let us look at you!"

"But you don't look so very different!" they complained. "You do look happy, but not so very much happier. Oughtn't you to show something rather special on your face?"

"Perhaps," he said, "the happiness hasn't had time to work through."

"Perhaps," they assented, "perhaps—but it is difficult to ever feel just awfully happy and not rather more sad all the time, isn't it? We know—you're miserably happy, aren't you?"

"That might be it," he agreed.

"And we are happily miserable," they said—"happy for you and miserable for ourselves."

"And happy for Ger, too?"

"Of course for Ger, too!" They had always known,

they declared, that Ger was only pretending not to care for him. "Though she never knew she was pretending herself, she never knew it the least little bit in the world," they carefully explained.

"Well," he said, "don't forget the bargain—half of every year you spend with us, and as much more as suits you."

"*Us!*" they cried. "Doesn't he sound beautifully married, anyway! You dear old soul! you really do sound married already!

"We won't forget," they promised; "but we've had her all the year and every day and all our lives, you see. You don't know what you're getting, but we know every bit of what we're losing—and there is so much of it."

"I think, little sisters, that I do know what I'm getting," said he.

They searched his face with undimmed young eyes.

"Yes, perhaps you do," they said; "we think you know. And you don't," they went on, "want to be kissed; don't want anything made up to you to-night, do you?"

"Not to-night, little sisters, not to-night."

"But you won't mind," they said, "our kissing Ger? For she isn't a tiny bit sentimental—like that. She'd only think we were vexed with her for wanting to go away from us, and it would hurt her, and she'd never understand. You won't mind us giving a few extra hugs and kisses to Ger?"

He looked down in the light of the street lamp at the two faces turned to him, the clever, discerning little faces of Bee and Babs.

"Do just as you think best," he said. "And I don't fancy you're likely to go far wrong."

"Well, good-by," they said, "and don't you forget we're going to choose the waistcoat you're married in—you know you promised. Good-by, brother!" they cried, and scampered away from him.

Leaving him with his uneven smile mounting to his eyes, and settling there; with a great joy surging round his warm heart, and filling it; with only one drawback to his perfect happiness—a sense of unworthiness toward his fate that he alone was ever keen enough to detect.

XVII

PAULINE seemed to herself to sit there waiting for Everard's return so long that every sense became dead in her save only the sense of hearing. It seemed to her as if he was never coming, would never come back to her again; that she would never be set free from this endless trance in which she must wait and listen—wait and listen; that nothing but his coming could end it for her, but that he would never come; and then at last there fell on her listening ear the familiar footsteps on the gravel outside, the familiar footsteps in the hall within.

But she did not go out to meet him; there was no one about likely to intercept her with her burden of news now. Indeed, in the long-drawn act of waiting she had grown almost oblivious of the reasons that had first forced her into it, and she continued to wait for him during those last few seconds exactly as she had waited all the time. Only when he came into the room did she get upon her feet, and then she did not move toward him, did not speak. She looked at him, but Everard did not return her look.

His face was gray and pinched; all the newly marked lines about his mouth showed doubly prominent, his cheeks looked hollow, fallen in, his light eyes sightless. He seemed to grope his way to his chair; he seemed to be

shivering with cold and fatigue; his shoulders were bent, and his long limbs tottered under him like the limbs of an old man. He had walked all the way home, and the walk had failed to warm him. He was a good walker, as a rule, and fond of it; he would have thought nothing of the walk—as a rule. To-night, instead of warming him, invigorating him, it had only served to render him colder and more intensely weary with every heavy dragging step he took. He sank into the low, wide chair, and sat there silent and huddled to one side, leaning over one arm, his face pressed against the chair-back, his eyes closed. His skin was very fine and fair—fairest on his forehead where his hat shaded it out-of-doors—with little blue veins clearly showing through it about his temples and his eyelids. He always had a still and rather death-like air when his eyes were closed, when he slept, and to-night gray shadows outlined his mouth, and his mouth was blue with cold.

"Everard!" Pauline cried, a cry that was no louder than a whisper, and yet filled the room like the chill last breath of tragedy.

"For God's sake don't tell me anything until you've given me something to take!" Everard said, in a voice that was muffled and toneless.

Pauline had been sitting so motionless that when she first moved she felt as though all the blood had been drained from her body, as though she were carved in cold marble of incredible, immovable weight. But with the effort she had made to speak even that one word, the blood seemed to come tingling back in a wild torrent through her veins. from her feet to her head she could

feel it tingling and burning within her; the gush of it to her brain seemed so powerful that she could not think for herself—before she could help Everard he must show her the way.

"What will you have?" she asked; "what shall I get you?"

"Anything. Something to drink—some brandy."

They were in the dining-room, and the table was still laid for dinner—the dinner that had never been paid the compliment of a thought from any one. Set free from the thraldom of her own sensations by Everard's words to the extent of being able to follow his directions and nothing more, Pauline poured a little water into a glass, found the brandy bottle in the sideboard, and brought them to Everard. He roused himself to take the bottle from her, steadying himself enough to pour some brandy into the glass while she still held it; when he had swallowed the contents at a gulp he took the bottle again, helped himself again, and drank it down this time neat.

"Take it away, Paulie," he said then, and sank back into his former huddled attitude.

"If it hadn't been for you," he told her when she came back from mechanically putting glass and bottle exactly where she found them, "but for the thought of you waiting for me, I should have gone into the first pub I passed, and got blind drunk to-night, Paulie—if I could."

"Everard," she said, returning slowly to clearness out of wild confusion of thought; growing to the realization of the events before and behind her, to knowledge of the thing still left for him to hear, for her to tell—"do you

know I almost wish you could have done it?—wish you were the sort of man who drowns trouble so."

"But I am not, Paulie," he said, "not in the least that sort of man. Doesn't the smell of the stuff make me sick? I had to have that just now to warm me, but it makes me feel deadly sick always. My head is too strong for my stomach; I couldn't drink enough to get muddled on. You're husband's a poor fool, Paulie—deprived by nature of even the fool's cheapest consolations."

"Don't, darling," she said, as she so often found occasion to say. "You wouldn't do it really—you had no real thought of doing it at all."

"If I hadn't," he said, "it was only because I thought of you waiting here for me."

"I've been waiting for you such a time!"

"I know. I've felt you waiting. And you had no thought but of my coming, Paulie?"

"No—for a long time I have had no thought but that."

"And I had no thought—that was a real thought—but to get to you. There was a terrible whirl going on in my brain, but right at the back of my thoughts, indistinguishable, hardly a part of me."

"We are together now, Everard."

"Yes," he said. Then his voice changed to a note of pleading, of soft entreaty. "Don't tell me anything yet, Paulie. Stir the fire—let me get warm first. I'm as cold as charity still—the charity of the idle woman and the Pharisee."

Pauline looked at him, and then knelt down before the grate—the fire was in no condition to stir, for it was not

lighted. She remembered now one of the servants coming in; she remembered now that the girl had busied herself with the fire that was out, had relaid it and asked if she should light it even. Apparently she had not answered, and the girl had taken her silence to mean that she did not need a fire that she had neglected to keep in. The evening, indeed, was quite mild—she was hot enough herself.

But she set light to the fire at once, and cleverly coaxed it into burning quickly, giving it all her attention, apparently all her thought. As the flames flickered up, Everard shifted his chair closer, stretched his long legs out to meet the warmth, but no warmth, to his impatient fancy, penetrated his thick boots, and he stooped to take them off. The effort, however, seemed too much for him, his stiff fingers fumbled uselessly at the laces, and with a groan of exasperation, of self-pity, he sank forlornly back again.

"I'll take them off for you, poor boy," Pauline said, and began to do so undeterred by his "Don't, Paulie, don't. Come and rub my hands instead, they're just as cold."

"I'll rub the poor hands," she said, "when the boots are off."

"Don't do it, Paulie. Leave my boots alone," he said fretfully.

"Darling," she asked, "who is going to help you if I mayn't?" and he said no more.

When that was finished, and his shoeless feet close to the grateful warmth, she rose and rubbed his hands with her warm fingers, rubbed and pressed them in her hot

palms till they grew less cold, less stiff and numb. She leaned over him, put her arms round him, held him tightly, warmly; set her hot, soft mouth against his lips, that were chill and blue.

"Now," she said at length, "you're better now. Warmer and better, dear. But it isn't a cold night, it's quite fine, and you've been walking, haven't you? What has chilled you so, Everard?"

"Nothing from the outside, Paulie," he said, smiling wanly, "but the weight of a stone cold heart within."

"Oh, Everard!" she cried, and drew away from him, stood up and wrung her hands together. "Oh, my poor boy! And you haven't heard what I've got to tell you yet!"

"I know what you've got to tell me," he said. "You needn't tell me—I know. It's all out. Our miserable secret's out, Paulie, and everybody knows."

"Enough know it to insure everybody knowing it by to-morrow. But who told you? Who was cruel enough to tell you when they needn't?"

"No one told me," he said. "I don't know how I knew except that I did know, unless one of your ghosts told me—threw it at me to mock me because I mocked at them long ago. I've been up to the Grand Stand, Paulie; I've walked from there now. It doesn't look any different; we've changed, but the Stand hasn't. Do you remember that was where you saw the ghosts first? You saw them plainly as soon as that, and I wouldn't believe in them, do you remember? I was wrong; they were there; they settled on us as you said they would. They've followed us from then; we shall never get rid of

them—they are everywhere. There were crowds of them there to-night—all the same old fellows and plenty more —I couldn't escape them this time," he paused and went on again. "It isn't so very wonderful, dear, that I should know when a thing has happened that I've been expecting day and night for months, is it?"

"But you don't know how it happened," she said, her color fading, her sad eyes darkening.

"No," he said, "not how it happened. But I know what I should have done if I'd been less of a coward, if I'd your strength, Paulie—if I were you! I'd have stood up before all those cackling old hens and told them the truth once for all—shut their mouths with the bare truth once for all—they've deserved it for the cackling they've done, and the spirit they've done it in. Oh, I'm not making it up—fancying anything! I know pretty well who has tried not to think evil of us, and who has wallowed in it in this place. I've had jolly good opportunities of knowing. That's what I should have done—told them myself—wiped the stain of cowardice away from us at least—if I wasn't too great a coward, Paulie. And now it's too late for even that."

"Not—for even that," she repeated after him. "For I am your wife, Everard. Oh, am I not part of you? And I did it."

"You, Paulie?" he cried. "You did it—like that, Paulie?" He half rose and fell back again. He ground his strong white teeth together in a sudden gust of blinding, impotent rage that yet left his wife untouched. "For the sake of the tortures I've suffered going in and

out among them, I think I might have been given a sight of their faces," he said.

But whether Pauline heard him or not he did not know. She began to speak breathlessly, rapidly; began her delayed defense, and would not be stayed any further.

"I did it, Everard," she said, with a note of supplication in her voice that cut him to the heart, that wrung the jeering, bitter triumph out of him, "but by our love I did not mean to do it until the moment came! And if I could have spared you—even then, my darling, if I could have spared you! Oh, Everard, my own, my dearest, will you believe I would have died to spare you then?"

"I know it," was all he said.

"All the afternoon was so strange," she went on, "and the people so strange; half as if they knew really, as if something unseen was in the room telling them; going round and whispering it in their ears. And I felt so far away from them—so much nearer to you. I was with you—I wasn't there, except that I could feel a lot of strange people round me thinking more than they said, though they said things, too. They seemed goading me, Everard—what there was of me there——"

"Damn them!" said Everard, fiercely, suddenly.

"I expect it was myself all the time—I expect it wasn't them at all, but that is how it felt, and then we had little Pauline in—they asked for her and would have her. I knew you wouldn't like it, and that Mrs. Betteridge didn't want her to come in, and I saw Gertrude look up and look worried, but it didn't seem as if I could

prevent it; as if I could do anything, and she came in looking such a dear baby—so sweet and innocent—and yet it got worse and worse, and—oh, Everard, I do not know! All I know is that God seemed calling me to take the last chance I should ever be given of freeing my soul, and your soul, from the curse that follows forever a sin that isn't confessed—that is hidden away and denied. It seemed to me that whether I spoke or whether I didn't, every one would know just the same, but that the difference to us would be eternal—that we should never have another chance here of taking our punishment upon ourselves, but that we should be punished all the same and not for a little time, for this life only perhaps, but forever. If I could endure that thought for myself, how could I endure it for you? I couldn't endure it. I had to speak before it was too late—I had to——"

For a few moments—moments that seemed to outspan a lifetime—neither of them spoke, neither of them moved. Then Everard shaded his eyes with a weary gesture and Pauline flung herself upon her knees before him.

"I did it then," she said, "because I had no choice left, because I felt that without God's forgiveness I could not live any longer." Then her voice changed, ringing in his ears with a passion that was fierce, that was despairing. "But I can not live without your forgiveness either. And if you can not forgive me, I shall die of that!"

"What have I to forgive you, Paulie?" he asked.

"Everything," she said. "All the unhappiness that has come into your life. First the temptation to do

wrong. Oh, my dear! you were such a boy until then! Do you think I do not know? do not understand? And then the weakness that denied you help when you needed it most, and now this—to make all your hard work of no avail, to drag you into open shame, to spoil your good name for you!"

He leaned forward, made a ring of his arms about her kneeling form, looked with his pained eyes into her eyes so wild, so pathetic; looked into them till the shadow lifted—lifted at least a little in their haunted depths that once he had loved for mystery and now he loved out of knowledge.

"So you're not content with saving my soul against my will, Paulie?" he said, "you must be not only the scapegoat, but the cause of all my sins as well? Child! Child! you can not reconcile so many callings, you must choose and, dearest, haven't you chosen?" He held her closer. "Listen," he said, "there is no question of forgiveness possible, there is nothing for me to forgive —listen to me now. For I am glad that you have chosen as you have chosen—glad—do you understand? I couldn't have done it myself, but I am thankful to have it over and done with in spite of me. I couldn't have borne the thought of it much longer—you know me so well, you know I have been expecting it for months, know that I have been suffering the tortures of the damned to keep the respect of a whole lot of people I don't really care a damn for—that's the sort of fool I am, Paulie, as you know, and I am thankful now to be saved from my own foolishness. We'll go from here—I shouldn't wonder if old Humphrey's got a suitable

opening for us up his sleeve in preparation—it would be just like him—and we'll start afresh and do better." A slow smile crept into his pained eyes.

"You won't object to our going, Paulie? It isn't part of your plan of penance to keep on here?"

"No," she said, "we couldn't—they wouldn't have us, I think. After the things they said this afternoon I know that we had better go."

"Don't tell me anything they said! The thought of their daring to hint anything sickens me—maddens me——"

"What they hinted at was the truth, Everard," Pauline said, and then speaking to his eyes, "Go on," she begged him, "forget all that for to-night. Tell me the rest of your heart to comfort mine."

"Well, then, I am glad, Paulie, for two more reasons, at least, for the future and the past. The one out of the past I have never told you—I have been ashamed to. Before he died the dear old Dad confessed to me—to me, good God—that he had grown to regret the means he used to persuade you out of your original purpose to keep the child so much, that it was the one sin he was dying in the fear of, and he made me promise I would think of that to help me to a different choice for us if the opportunity arose. I never meant to think of it if I could help it, but I couldn't help it. It fastened on me and has been with me constantly, has never since left me, though I never made the opportunity; though I shouldn't have taken it if it had come to me."

"You promised—that showed you meant to keep it one day."

"The promise was no promise," he said. "I never meant to keep it. He was overwrought and needed rest of mind before he could die peacefully, and I bought his peaceful death for him with a promise, as I might have given him a sleeping draught if that would have done as well. And as he died I thought 'now, perhaps, you know what your son's promises are worth!' Ah, my wife—I am glad to think that perhaps he is thankful to see me forced into his way at last—by you—and glad to be forced there."

"Everard!" she said, and then, "For the future, dear? Will you tell me of that? Why you are glad for that?"

"Because of this child coming to us," he said. "Because I have felt that I could never give the poor little beggar any welcome, or any love, while it seemed to be taking the place that belongs to little Pauline."

"You would have loved it when it came," she said. "But how I love you, Everard, for that fear!"

"Didn't you fear it?"

"How often!" she said. "How often!"

"And I am glad," he went on, "of anything that satisfies my wife. Is my wife satisfied?"

"Ah, dearest, how can I be that? Isn't it instead of the best only the best we can do? Can a patched garment ever be the same as a new garment to any one?"

"Yet a patched garment is better than a rent garment with the rent left unmended?"

"Oh, yes, yes, Everard! So much better, dear."

"Pauline," he said, "I want you to quite understand. I am glad it is all out just for the sake of the relief of

facing the worst after dreading it. I love you so dearly —better I think than I have ever loved you—that I would rather walk the hardest path with you, just for the sake of being with you, than the easiest path alone, but there you have it all; that is as far, it seems, as I can go. If we had never been found out I could never have found much to regret, if anything."

"But it would have *been* the same," she said, as she said ever.

"To you Paulie, but not to me. I can not go the whole length, dear."

She looked into his face, into his eyes. Searched eagerly lest anything should escape her; looked lovingly, longingly, tenderly.

"Everard! Everard! Do you want to go the whole length?" she cried.

"Yes," said Everard.

(1)

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